

# ***What, che?***

**Integration, Adaptation and Assimilation  
of the Irish-Argentine Community  
through its Language and Literature**

Doctoral dissertation

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## ABSTRACT

During the second half of the XIX century up to the 1920s, due to different reasons –political, economic (mainly the failures of the potato crop) and religious, plus reports from people who had previously left the Emerald Isle and were then wealthy in the Province of Buenos Aires, and the promotion of the Catholic Church and the Argentine Government as well–, Irish immigrants landed into a far-off country named Argentina. At that time the main destinations of the Irish Diaspora were England, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Argentina was the only non-English speaking destination; though a Catholic country, Spanish language was the main barrier for the integration and adaptation of the newcomers with the South American country. Additionally, the Irish community tried to protect their identity and unity by preserving the English language, which was not their original tongue.

*What, che? Integration, Adaptation and Assimilation of the Irish-Argentine Community through its Language and Literature* argues that the slow incorporation of the Irish immigrants to the host society, its ups and downs, are revealed through their language and literature, that there is a correlation between the Irish Diaspora to Argentina and words, speeches, verbal communication. By examining newspapers, magazines, private documents, oral histories, interviews and emblematic literary works of the Irish-Porteños, this thesis gives an account of the process, stresses its ways or modes, reflects on the linguistic correspondence between life and language and interprets the development of Irish-Argentine discourses and literary expressions.

Never comprehensively and systematically assessed, the exploration of this matter might turn out to be a contribution to social and linguistic studies related to migration processes, a suitable document to unveil the somewhat elusive but strong power of words.



## INTRODUCTION

In the same way as it took place in other countries –the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand–, migration processes in Argentina were central to its national conformation and development.

According to Fernando Devoto, between 1881 and 1914, nearly 4,200,000 people arrived in Buenos Aires (about 2,000,000 of whom were Italians, 1,400,000 Spaniards, 170,000 French, and 160,000 Russians).<sup>1</sup> Previous to these massive immigrations, successive waves of *extranjeros* (foreigners) or *inmigrantes* (immigrants) had been settling along the River Plate, Uruguay included.<sup>2</sup>

Members of other foreign communities such as the German, Dutch, Belgian, Jewish, Syrian-Lebanese, Armenian, Danish and Irish complete the picture of that rich period of our history. Compared to the Italian and Spanish migration waves, the latter groups were of a significant lesser importance.

The Argentine Republic was the only non-English speaking country where the Irish settled during the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Language, then, was the main obstacle for their integration, adaptation and assimilation. Perhaps because of

1. Devoto, F. (2009). *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, p. 247.

2. A semantic debate on the condition of being a “foreigner” or an “immigrant” arose at the time. The relatively poor and the peasants, including anybody willing to work in the countryside or in the promotion of industry, would be considered a “migrant”, while travelers, professionals, businessmen, churchmen, were addressed as “foreigners”. Rooted in Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s ideas on the civilizing role of the European migrants within the Argentine society, as well as in the 1853 Constitution, the 1876 law related to immigration and colonization stated that it was understood that the migrant steamers mentioned in the legislation were both, those coming from Europe and from other places. In chapter I there is a reference to Lawrence Casey, James Spencer Wilde and doctors Thomas Falkner and Michael O’Gorman who came to the River Plate for business, professional or religious purposes, some of them through Spain.

its minor significance, for many years this segment of the Irish Diaspora was ignored by academics and by Ireland herself. In 1919, an Irish-American, Thomas Murray, wrote *The Story of the Irish in Argentina*, an unsystematic, chaotic, awkward and amateur work, considered a classic for the simple reason that it was the only one committed to the topic as a whole. Although other books and articles were related to Irish-Porteño matters or personalities, it was not until the 1970s that regular studies on the subject began: Eduardo Coghlan, Juan Carlos Korol, Hilda Sabato, Patrick MacKenna, Laura Izarra and others (all of them included in the bibliography) started a serious research and a reflection on the anomalous existence of an Irish community in Argentina, its relevance and implications. As far as I know, mine is the first integrated project dealing with language as an original problem and (even with literature) as a revealing factor of the situation of the Irish immigrants and their descendants in Argentina. In this sense, my approach to the main Irish-Porteño texts, which I consider the most significant of the process –*Tales of the Pampas*, by William Bulfin; *You'll Never Go Back*, by Kathleen Nevin; and the four "Irish" short stories by Rodolfo J. Walsh– is linguistic and, in terms of literary analysis, stylistic. It is thanks to the sensible, sharp, acute ears of narrators Bulfin and Nevin that we know how the old Irish-Porteños spoke. Their renditions are confirmed by *The Southern Cross*, and in letters and memoirs, while, in relation to the last generations, it is throughout interviews where we can listen to the old ancestors threading through contemporary speaking. We can learn about what is known as Irish *brogue*, the Irish way of speaking. Although written in Spanish, the stories by Walsh –"Los oficios terrestres", "Irlandeses detrás de un gato", "Un oscuro día de justicia" and "El 37"–, as we will see, show signs and resonances of the original Irish language and of the imposed English tongue. At a certain stage, my approach focuses more on *how* these three writers convey their worlds rather than *what* their stories express in terms of ideas, plot or setting. When examining Bulfin and Nevin we discover Spanish language undermines English, which will be gradually displaced and replaced. The culmination of this occurrence



can be seen in Walsh and in the written and oral speech of the Irish-Argentines.

In more than one sense, this is a project of ethnography, an approach aiming to learn about people, communities and institutions. The result is an interpretative narration of documents, letters and literature; it includes personal interaction with people. Since the objective of this essay is descriptive and interpretative and while it does not try to solve a “problem”, quoting LeCompte and Schensul, it should be considered a *basic* research. These authors state a series of conditions that are essential to the creation of a Theory of Culture. The following are those conditions I believe should be considered within this investigation:

1. It is rooted in the concept of culture, consisting in beliefs, patterns of behavior, rules, actions, social arrangements “and forms of expression that form a describable pattern in the lives of members of a community.”<sup>3</sup>
2. The product should be a story as it takes place in its natural setting.
3. The researcher should be intimately involved with the members of the community, even if he/she is an outsider.

According to Mauss, “the ethnographer must recover the deep phenomena, the ones which are almost unconscious, since they exist only in the collective tradition”.<sup>4</sup>

Wisely, LeCompte and Schensul state that “all research is informed by particular worldviews or perspectives held by the researcher and scholars within his or her discipline”.<sup>5</sup> These so-called paradigms are, then, an interpretation of world and existence. This researcher is no exception and sticks to the

3. LeCompte, M., & Schensul J. (2010). *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research*. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2010, p. 8.

4. Lukes, S. (1999). Conclusion. In Carrithers, M., Collins, S., & Lukes, S. (Eds.), *The category of the person. Anthropology, philosophy, history* (p. 291). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5. LeCompte, M., & Schensul J. *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

rule. Finally, these essayists stress that “critical theory calls for a focus on the ways in which gender, class, culture, race, ethnicity, and power intersect to shape inequities. Included in this focus is the requirement that researchers themselves be aware of *how* their own class status; racial, ethnic, and gender orientation; and power relationships vis-à-vis research participants affect *what* and *how* phenomena are studied and *how* data interpreted.”<sup>6</sup> (Emphasis added.) Being conscious and knowledgeable of this requirement, my approach is supported by historical facts, cultural expressions and, mainly, by linguistic variations.

Within the context of different European communities being concentrated in a foreign country, identity appeared as a problem. At the beginning of the twentieth century the expression “*crisol de razas*” (melting pot), understood with a positive connotation, gave an idea of a country where immigrants belonging to different cultures were integrated. The concept of a “multicultural” society might clarify the idea of the phenomenon, a new reality in which different communities coexist peacefully preserving their identity and their traditions. This project shows that this concept is the one that governed the lives and patterns of behavior of the Irish community in Argentina from the beginning, and that, in a very sluggish process, coexistence or integration became adaptation and, finally, assimilation. “Integration”, “adaptation” and “assimilation” are, then, key words in my dissertation. Within this context, I understand “integration” as the act of mixing people; “adaptation” as the process of trying to change behavior and customs to suit a new situation;<sup>7</sup> and “assimilation” as the act of “becoming a part of a country or community rather than remaining in a different group” (Oxford Dictionary).

My argument is a description of a process in which different generations of Irish-Argentines witnessed how their (imposed)

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

7. Etymologically, “to fit or join together”, in Skeat, W. (1993) *Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, p. 15.

first language<sup>8</sup> became a second one, while Spanish finally changed into their first tongue. Such irregular modification of positions implied a subtle alteration in the identity of both Irish immigrants and Irish-Argentines as well as a gradual transformation of attitude in relation to the host country. Press, diaries, memoirs, letters, interviews and literature shape up the course of this story.

On account of the nature of this essay, references to the Irish-Gaelic language and to bilingualism are frequent; still, Irish language and bilingualism are not subjects of this writing.

Because literature is always language, the significant words and speeches that can be found in the literary works selected represent the main stages of the process. Although chronologically published after William Bulfin's collection of short stories, *You'll Never Go Back*, by Kathleen Nevin, gives an account of what was supposed to be a temporary adaptation, a frustrated arrangement announced by the title of the novel itself; Bulfin's book, *Tales of the Pampas*, is an eloquent description of the Irish-Porteños and their determination to become part of the countryside scene, working together with *gauchos* and peasants as foremen in the wild *pampa*. Clearly embodying the assimilation with the host country, Rodolfo J. Walsh –his life and his work (mainly his four short stories set in

8. Irish or Irish-Gaelic was the original language of the people of Ireland. The Gaels (or the Irish) went to Ireland around 333 BC. During their settlement, they were "visited" by different invaders: among others, the Vikings in 795, the Normans in 1169, and, in 1171, by Richard Pembroke, also known as Richard Strongbow; according to the *Columbia Encyclopedia* (fifth edition), "He went as an adventurer (1170) to Ireland at the request of the hard-pressed Dermot McMurrugh, king of Leinster. Strongbow subdued much of E. Ireland, including Dublin, in victories over Rory O'Connor, king of Connaught, and married Dermot's daughter. Henry II of England, although he had given permission for the earl's expedition, visited him in 1171 to claim the rich coastal cities and to receive Strongbow's homage for the fief of the interior of Leinster." Dermot Mac Murrugh, deposed king of Leinster, had asked Henry II for help to recover his titles and land. It must be remembered that Adrian IV, English Pope, authorized the invasion (see The Bull of Pope Adrian IV Empowering Henry II to Conquer Ireland, AD 1155). Before and after these episodes (1188), several statutes were designed to promote the English language and the destruction of the Irish language and culture. (Also see, for example, Henry VIII's Act for the English Order, Habit and Language, 1537).

an Irish-Porteño boarding school– represents the culmination of a hard and more than once contradictory long process, at the end of which Irish-Porteños undoubtedly became part of a conflicting and, sometimes, bizarre country.

To the always increasing bibliography on the subject of the Irish Diaspora in Argentina, and to the mentioned documents, I must add my own condition of Irish-Porteño and the experience of being a contributor to *The Southern Cross* for more than forty years, as sources and references of this work which, in the end, intends to be a reflection on life in its ineffable relationship with language.

Even though Irish and Irish descents can be found in practically every area and national activity, and some of them became noteworthy names, the Irish-Argentine community is not important as a block. Nobody knows how many Irish descents live in Argentina, but if going through newspapers, obituaries, ads and general news, a significant number of Irish names will be found. As it has been said, Argentina did not receive a significant quantity of people, but the initial amount of more than 10,000 Irish immigrants was the seed of a huge but indefinite Irish-Argentine community of between 300,000 and 500,000 souls. What I call the *visible* Irish group is constituted by those who celebrate St. Patrick's Day, meet for religious, social, or sport events at Holy Cross or St. Patrick's churches, at the Fahy or the Hurling Clubs, and are subscribed to *The Southern Cross*, a paper with a monthly regular and meager circulation of not much more than 1000 copies (which gives an idea of the irrelevance of the segment). Most of the Irish-Argentines have been gradually absorbed by the greater mass of population, thus becoming the *invisible* Irish-Argentine group, people who, together with all kinds of inhabitants, silently struggle for their own Argentine identity.

The first chapter of this work will offer an historical account of the Irish migration process in Argentina, in order to better understand in what context the process of integration, adaptation and assimilation took place. A presentation and description of the Irish English Variation and the subsequent Hiberno Argentine case will precede the three central chapters

referred to the main question of this work. Thus, by exploring newspapers, magazines, private documents, oral histories and the emblematic literary works mentioned, chapters III, IV and V become essential sections in the sense that they critically show, describe, analyze and reflect on the language of the migrants and their descendants as from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century-Irish-English and 20<sup>th</sup>-century-Hiberno-Argentine variation to the present linguistic assimilation.

The slow expansion that goes from integration and adaptation to assimilation is expressed through language and literature (its aesthetical face), thus revealing ties between words and life. The fact is that the story of the Irish in Argentina shows that intimate connection and correlation between verbal communication and human existence.

*Buenos Aires, January 28, 2015*



The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.

(...)

The spell of arms and voices: the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations. They are held out to say: We are alone... come. And the voices say with them: We are your kinsmen. And the air is thick with their company as they call to me, their kinsman, making ready to go, shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth.

James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916.

Maire: I'm talking about the Liberator, Master, as you well know. And what he said was this: "The old language is a barrier to modern progress." He said that last month. And he's right. I don't want Greek. I don't want Latin. I want English.

(...)

Yolland: (...) Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be... hermetic, won't it?

Brian Friel, *Translations*, 1980.





## CHAPTER I

### The Irish in Argentina: Historical Context

“What do you think will happen, Father Tom?” said the doctor as they walked along.

(...) “I’m afraid that something is going to happen in Ireland that will make our race wanderers on the face of the earth like the ancient Jews. I dream of many things. And in my dreams I see woeful destruction coming. But I dream, too, of a resurrection and a homecoming. Remember that, son. Look round you. Listen to the wind.”

Liam O’Flaherty, *Famine*, 1937.

In a way, the story of the language and literature of the Irish in Argentina is the story of the Irish in Argentina.

A brief report on aspects related to Irish history will surely contribute to a better understanding of Ireland as a migration country, and her very special relation with language, a central problem in this work.

In 1541 Henry VIII reinforced the control of the Emerald Isle –previously invaded by Celts, Vikings, Normans and Anglo-Normans– and proclaimed himself King of Ireland. One of his principal objectives was the annihilation of the Irish language, intimately related to identity. The fact was that, gradually, the Irish language was reduced to the rural areas and, in the cities, to the domestic staff. But at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the countryside population had increased significantly together with the propagation of the Irish language. It is considered that by 1835 Irish speakers rounded about four millions.

From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the population of Ireland began to increase substantially. This increase occurred primarily among the poorer rural classes and, since a large proportion of that sector was still Irish-speaking, there was a disproportionate increase in the number of Irish speakers. There are no exact figures available, but in 1820 the number of Irish speakers was

estimated at 3,500,000 and in 1835 it was estimated at 4,000,000. There had never before been so many Irish speakers and to friendly, disinterested and hostile observers alike it appeared that Irish was making a massive recovery. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see the reality in starker clarity: these Irish-speaking masses were without economic or political power, and had no means of determining their own destiny. They had, of course, leaders such as Daniel O'Connell or at a more local level the diarist Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin, who fought for their civil and economic rights. Such leaders though they professed an unfeigned emotional attachment to Irish, were generally willing enough to adapt to the existing pattern in which English was the language of politics, public affairs, education, and social advancement. In these circumstances, ordinary Irish speakers sought competence in English as essential either for social mobility at home or for emigration to better conditions in Britain or the United States. Even the most underprivileged sections of the community acquired more secure access to an elementary education in English after the National School system had been set up in 1831. This made it possible for them to switch to English and, after the trauma of the Great Famine, they had little hesitation in doing so.<sup>9</sup>

Prepared for an eventual Spanish attack, in 1595, Elizabeth I strengthened the English Army in Ireland and subjugated political forces. More than that, she designed a series of colonies which she assigned to loyal subjects of the crown, a plan which was deepened by James I. Curiously, the only one that subsisted was that of Ulster, a strong Celtic city and the last to surrender.

The famous Siege or Battle of Kinsale, in December 1601, marked an important milestone in Irish culture; in fact, it meant the beginning of the end of Gaelic Ireland. Within the context of Queen Elizabeth I's reign and the Nine Years' War, it was a consequence of a campaign of Irish clan leaders (Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell) against English rule. Since Spain was also involved, it is considered part of the Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604). The battle was a complete catastrophe for the Irish

9. Ó Murchú, M. (1985). *The Irish Language*. Dublin: Government of Ireland, p. 26.

and a remote cause of that rather mysterious episode of the Irish History called The Flight of the Earls.

The seventeenth century is the most pivotal century of disaster for Gaelic culture. It did not “die” after the Battle of Kinsale (1601) but was severely clobbered.<sup>10</sup> The Irish fought three great wars (1593-1601; 1641-53; 1689-91) in the course of the seventeenth century against the English and got hammered in each of them. Although these are often seen in crudely political terms, they were also wars between Irish-speakers or bearers of Gaelic culture and those who were bent on their destruction. Traditional Gaelic society went into exile in September 1607, when the Ulster leaders decided that Spanish wine would give them more hope than Donegal poteen, although they may have been mistaken. The War of the Confederation (1641-1653) between an alliance of regal Irish and more progressive off-with-their-heads nationalists against Cromwellian English-only republicans resulted in the deportation of the landed Irish leaders to the badland of Connacht, and the exile of intellectual and disaffected as slaves and chattels to the West Indies. Each war was a step down on the ladder for the normal Irish speaker.<sup>11</sup>

Forty years after, trying to force concessions for the Catholics living under the English rule, a new Irish rebellion took place. The imposition of the English language and culture, and large scale “Plantations” (i.e. confiscations of properties from the Irish landowners who had rebelled against the crown) were, probably, the principal causes of the revolt known as the Irish Rebellion of 1641. The insurrection was part of the Eleven

10. The 14<sup>th</sup> September 1607 was the day that the two remaining Northern Earls of Ireland (the Earl of Tyrone, Hugh O'Neill and the Earl of Tyrconnell, Rory O'Donnell) together with about nearly ninety families and followers fled Old Ireland off to Spain with, apparently, no clear or serious reasons. The Earls were descended from Gaelic clan dynasties that had ruled important areas of Ulster. In brief, what happened was that the Gaelic aristocracy of Ulster left definitely. Both leaders, financially assisted by the Pope, died in Rome. The result was the expansion of the Ulster Plantations and the beginning of a long story of departures from Ireland to the rest of the world.

11. *A Pocket History of Gaelic Culture*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press, pp. 63-64.

Years' War<sup>12</sup>, and, although the coup failed, the result was the founding of the Irish Catholic Confederation and beginning of the Confederate War, which continued till the 1650s when Oliver Cromwell cruelly defeated the Irish Catholics and Royalists, re-conquering the country.

These events were followed by the Penal Laws that, according to Edmund Burke, were “a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.”<sup>13</sup> Some of the Penal Laws were: ban to Catholics and Protestant dissenters entering Trinity College Dublin; ban on Catholics buying land under a lease of more than 31 years; ban on Catholics inheriting Protestant land; Roman Catholic lay priests had to register to preach under the Registration Act 1704, but seminary priests and Bishops were not able to do so until 1778; “No person of the Popish religion shall publicly or in private houses teach school, or instruct you in learning within this realm” upon pain of twenty pounds fine and three months in prison for every such offence, etc. Gradually, most of these regulations were repealed.

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestants (20% of the population) owned 86% of the Irish land. But it was a fact that at this same time the cultural division was weakening. Many English lords spoke the Irish language, promoted Irish poetry and music, and even intermarried. In a way they were “more Irish than the Irish” or, as they put it in Latin *Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis*.

As time went on, the Anglo-Irish ruling class was able to put an end to most of the unjust anti-Irish laws, and the curious counterpart of this was the slow acquisition of the English language on behalf of the wealthy classes. The Irish language,

12. The Eleven Years' War (or Irish Confederate Wars) that took place in Ireland between 1641 and 1653 (eleven years and six months) was a religious and ethnic conflict. The consequences of this struggle were the English Parliamentary conquest of Ireland, defeat of Royalists and crushing of Irish Catholic power.

13. Wikipedia (s.d.). Retrieved on 10 January 2015 from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal\\_Laws\\_\(Ireland\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_Laws_(Ireland))

then, appeared being associated with poverty.

In 1801, through a document ironically called Act of Union, Ireland was annexed to the United Kingdom, which meant the end of the Irish Parliament; Daniel O'Connell became the first Irish Catholic parliamentarian in Westminster.

More than one attempt to revert this situation appeared weakened by the terrible famine, originated by several crop potato failures, known as the Great Famine (1845-1852). The potato was the central food in Ireland at that time, and more than a million people died as a consequence of the food crisis and many more migrated off to England, the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and even to a far-off country named Argentina.

The Great Famine was a contribution to Irish Nationalism. Different parliamentary agreements, the action of terrorist groups and Charles Stewart Parnell's leadership promoted, in 1914, the "Home Rule", the creation of an independent Irish Parliament, which, in fact was postponed on account of WWI.

Headed by Pádraic Pearse, poet, teacher and soldier, a political coalition proclaimed, in 1916, the creation of the Irish Republic. Known as the Easter Rising, this short proclamation ended with the execution of the rebellion's leaders.

However, military confrontations and intrigues continued and, in 1922, after an armistice, the island was divided in the Free State of Ireland and, linked to the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland (six counties most of whose population was Protestant).

With the election of the first President under the 1937 Constitution, Ireland became a Republic, officially recognized in 1949.

The same year, that fusion of Celts, Vikings, Normans and British abandoned the Commonwealth to become the independent Republic of Ireland, called Éire in Irish-Gaelic.

Coming back to our story, the beginning should be traced not only within the insular Irish people who came along to America with the Spanish conquerors and missionaries<sup>14</sup> but

14. The first Irishman registered by the official account was Father Thomas

mainly in the two failed British invasions of Buenos Aires, in 1806 and 1807, commanded by William Carr Beresford and John Whitelocke. After being defeated, Irish mercenaries opted for staying in the land they had attacked. Spread all over the unknown territory, some of them “translated” their names into the Spanish language: Queenfaith became Reynafé; Campbell, Campana; Gowan, Gaona; and so on. The decision is relevant since it reveals what would become a regular attitude of the Irish migrants towards the adopted land. Others stuck to the army, as Peter Campbell, who got to be the oriental leader José Gervasio de Artigas’ second hand. In relation to this, it is pertinent to mention an episode recalled by Bartolomé Mitre in his *Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina*; it is referred to the Irish corporal Michael Skennon, who deserted the British army and fought against the invaders. Mitre states that the young soldier executed by an English firing squad “*combatía por su fe católica y contra los herejes ingleses al lado de los argentinos.*”<sup>15</sup>

Other travelers and businessmen completed an initial Irish community in Argentina. James Spencer Wilde, who came to Buenos Aires at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to found an official bank, married a native and in 1818 was able to put on two of his comedies, *Las tocayas* and *La quincallería*. He was the father of José Antonio, author of the classic description *Buenos Aires desde setenta años atrás*, and uncle of Eduardo, who wrote *Aguas abajo* and was a member of the so-called *Generación del 80*. Mercenary William Brown (1777-1857), “el Viejo Bruno”, according to Juan Manuel de Rosas, fought for

Field, a Jesuit from Limerick, although it is known that John and Thomas Farrell witnessed the foundation of Buenos Aires in 1536, and that Rita O’Daghan –great grandmother of José Hernández, author of the well-known narrative poem *Martín Fierro*– belonged to an Irish family and had married Juan Martín de Pueyrredón). There are also the individual adventures of accidental migrants who happened to appear in this land, like doctor Thomas Falkner, who came to Buenos Aires in 1730 where he met the Jesuits, abandoned his profession and worked as a missionary in Patagonia.

15. “(...) he fought on the Argentine side for the sake of his Catholic religion and against the heretic English.” (See: Mitre, B. (1978). *Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina* (volumen I, chapter 3. Buenos Aires: Eudeba).

the emancipation, founded the National Army and was, in 1826, governor of the province of Buenos Aires; John Thomond O'Brien (1786-1861) became José de San Martín's *aide-de-camp*. An amazing love story had three Irish names as central characters in 1848: the scandalous affair of a Catholic priest and a young girl of the top society of the time, who ran away together only to be threatened by an informer known as Fr. Michael Gannon. Advised by jurist Dalmacio Vélez Sarsfield, dictator Rosas was responsible for the execution of the daring lovers, Ladislao Gutiérrez and Camila O'Gorman, who was pregnant.

The good relationship with Spain was functional for that country to become a bridge between Ireland and the River Plate. Cullen, Lynch, O'Donnell, among others, were names that stepped on Buenos Aires during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries through Spain. More than that, Spain became an academic center for the Irish to whom high education was forbidden by the British. It was in this context that Michael O'Gorman, educated in Spain and France, founded the Escuela del Protomedicato in 1799, the anteroom of the local Faculty of Medicine.

By 1820 there was a sort of an Irish-Porteño community concentrated in Buenos Aires, which means that the Great Famine (1845-1852), a consequence of potato crops that failed many times causing the death of about a million people and forcing nearly another million to leave the country, was not the only reason for Irish migration to Argentina as it is frequently repeated; it was not even the principal cause, since Longford, Westmeath and Wexford (counties from where the majority of the Irish-Porteños originated) were not actually amongst the worst-affected counties by the potato crop failures. Fares to South America were expensive and migrants should be able to maintain themselves till they found a position.

In regular waves, Irish migration to Argentina began during the 1840s and continued until 1870, although there are records at the beginning of the twentieth century stating the names of the last newcomers who, like most of their predecessors, landed in Buenos Aires before moving onto rural areas. The fact is that

they considered themselves *porteños* and, little by little, the expression “Irish-Porteños” was coined for the sake of expressing their identity. Extended families of Argentinians who claim Irish ancestry are assigned to this cultural category of people and consider themselves “Irish-Porteños” rather than “Hiberno-Argentines”, the latter a less well-known or more generic name. From the very beginning, then, language has conveyed the ups and downs of Irish cultural assimilation to the faraway country.

Influenced by the Catholic Church and by very positive reports as sent home by immigrants to their compatriots back in Ireland, the Argentine Republic became the only Spanish-speaking country chosen by the Irish who had to leave Ireland as a consequence of different crises.<sup>16</sup>

According to T. W. Freeman in his *Pre-Famine Ireland*, “the cost of a third-class ticket from Liverpool to Buenos Aires was £16. A similar ticket from Ireland to North America cost £4 pre-Famine and as little as £0.75 after the Famine.”<sup>17</sup> Just to give an example, Lawrence Casey, whose son, Eduardo, became a millionaire and founded Venado Tuerto in Santa Fe and Pigüé in Buenos Aires, appeared in Argentina in 1839 (a year before the Famine) to benefit from the great farming potential, as many other compatriots had done.

Juan Carlos Korol and Hilda Sabato maintain that 10,500/11,500 Irish came out to Argentina (this statement presumably includes those who took the wrong steamer thinking that they were going to the States, and excludes those who re-emigrated elsewhere.) It is also considered that, by 1890, about 75,000 Irish-Argentines were living in the country,

16. I am referring to waves of migrants, more or less organized, seeking for work and peace in a promising land. In footnote 2, I mentioned the “Flight of the Earls”. During the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, young men of Ireland, known as “Wild Geese”, left their native land for service in the armies of continental Europe and America. Some of them became prominent. (Originally, the “Flight of the Wild Geese” was the departure of an Irish army commanded by Patrick Sarsfield from Ireland to France, as a consequence of the Treaty of Limerick, October 1691, after the end of the Williamite War.)

17. Irish Migration to Argentina. In O’Sullivan P. (Ed.), *Patterns of Migration* (p. 71). London: Leicester University Press.



mostly in Buenos Aires, although the province of Santa Fe was also a destination. These figures should be considered carefully because at that time Irish and English people were all registered as “British”, without distinction.

Because of the national government’s special interest, the official Catholic religion and certain native anglophile, the Irish were very well received.

In relation to those who did not like the country and went back to Ireland, an anonymous “poet” wrote the following lines preserved by popular tradition:

This is my last *Hesperidina*  
And thanks God my last *propina*.  
To hell with Argentina  
I shall never come back again!

The Irish migration to Argentina was a consequence of necessity (both internal and external) and opportunity. The fact that the nation was going through a period of expansion and development and, consequently, needed manpower for rural labor and production, was at the core of the issue. Most Irish were poor and unskilled, and drifted towards the countryside where they found work as laborers, trench-diggers, shepherds, sheep-breeders, tenants, landowners and even as small farmers. The sheep trade was a niche area at this juncture. The European market required large quantities of wool as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. The possibilities in the countryside were real. They became farmers, sheep raisers and in several cases owners of large extensions of land. They used to begin as unskilled laborers or *zanjeadores* doing what the natives would not: dig trenches for security and property limits before wire became the regular marking tool. They were very well paid for this. The unknown digger recalled by José Hernandez in the first part of his *Martín Fierro* was probably Irish and not English:

*Hasta un inglés sanjiador  
que decía en la última guerra  
que él era de Inca-la-perra*

*y que no quería servir,  
tuvo también que huir  
a guarecerse en la sierra.*<sup>18</sup>

William Mac Cann, a British businessman at the time, reports that most of these Irish were from Westmeath and that they usually started working in the country thanks to compatriots who had done well.

At the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865), the price of the wool fell, moving the Irish-Argentines to agriculture and cattle breeding.

Most of the migrants were male, young, single and in despair for Irish girls, since they rarely intermarried. This attitude lasted till about the 1950s. The advice was: "Have nothing to do with the natives"; "Never stick in with the blacks."

A different language, culture and way of life, and what the Irish considered an often-superficial Catholicism, ensured that the Irish remained a relatively isolated community.

The immigrant Church of these new arrivals was headed up by Irish chaplains who were much more than that: they also acted as civil and financial advisors and even matchmakers. Father Anthony Fahy (1804-1871), a Dominican who had worked with the Irish in New York and Chicago, was the indisputable leader of this Irish-Argentine community between 1844 (he arrived in Buenos Aires that year, a fact which demonstrates that there was an Irish community in this city even prior to the worst effects of the Famine) and 1871 when he died, another victim of the yellow fever.

His role can be compared to that of Moses Hirsch in relation to the Jewish Community in the Argentine Republic. An apostle, organizer of the Irish chaplains, founder of important Irish-Argentine institutions, a hard working laborer, a social adviser, Father Fahy has been recognized as the true Patriarch of the Irish settlers in the Argentine *pampas*. In his hard duty he was helped by a wealthy and insufficiently recognized Irish-

18. Even an Englishman ditch-digger / who said in the last war / that he wouldn't do the service / because he came from Inca-la-perra / he had to escape as well / and take cover in the hills. (Translator: unknown).

Protestant called Thomas Armstrong in whose house he lived.

He persistently urged his people then residing in the city, to move out to the camp,<sup>19</sup> where remunerative employments were easily obtained. The city was not the most suitable place for them. They were mostly from the central counties of Ireland, more accustomed to rural life than to their actual occupations.<sup>20</sup>

He was able to distinguish who could and who could not take advantage of the possibilities offered by the new country. By comparing the two following letters quoted by James Ussher in his book on Fahy, we can see how the Irish Patriarch dealt with people:

1. Would to God that Irish emigrants would come to this country, instead of the United States. Here they would feel at home; they would have plenty of employment, and experience a sympathy from the natives very different from what now drives too many of them from the States back to Ireland. There is not a finer country in the world for a poor man to come to, especially with a family. Vast plains lying idle for the want of hands to cultivate them, and where the government offers every protection and encouragement to the foreigner.<sup>21</sup>

2. Should any young men of respectable connections ask you for letters to come out here, tell them from me it is a bad country unless they bring out some capital. Laborers and men of capital can do well, but no other class. The want of the Spanish language is a terrible drawback on all young men.<sup>22</sup>

Note that, in financial terms, the second letter contradicts the first one, dated July 2, 1855, which is optimistic and written after eleven years working with the Irish-Argentine community. After twenty years, the Patriarch's attitude gradually changed

19. From the Spanish word *campo* (countryside), "camp", instead of "country" or "countryside".

20. Ussher, J. (1951). *Father Fahy*. Buenos Aires, p. 49.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 58

as we see in the second letter, dated March 28, 1863. He even states that "A whole lot of young men have arrived lately and they have been sorely disappointed in their expectations." (August 28, 1863).

Ussher concludes his report by stressing that Father Fahy dissuaded his own first cousin assuring that:

He would be worse off than in Ireland. This place is only for laborers and men of capital. Many decent well-reared young men have been ruined by coming out here."<sup>23</sup>

It is important to remark that the priest also stresses the importance of language: the lack of the Spanish tongue is defined as a "terrible" drawback.

It appears clear, then, that after many years working within the Irish-Argentine community, Father Fahy was in a privileged position to advise his people, based not only on their needs but also on the ups and downs of the host country.

Because he had been in New York and Chicago, where he saw the Irish ghettos and the conditions in which his people lived, and because he did not want the same for the Irish-Porteños, Father Fahy promoted the work in the countryside. By doing this he was reinforcing a typical Argentine antinomy of the time which was the opposition between the country and the city, civilization and barbarism, as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento stated in his famous book, *Facundo* (1845). Anyway, it was a fact that many losers left the countryside and went back to the city trying luck in the railway companies or in British and American corporations where the possession of the English language was a key for climbing positions. Fahy's association with Armstrong, who at the time was the head of Banco Provincia, was decisive in terms of investments and financial assistance. To the Irish-Argentine community, Father Fahy's death meant the beginning of the conclusion of a wealthy period. The ending of his authoritative style was also the beginning of a different era of the Irish-Porteños in

23. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

relation to the host society. In more than one way, Mgr. Patrick Dillon, founder of *The Southern Cross*, took Fahy's place and was functional to change and integration.

Following political leaders Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's work in the promotion of European migration, in 1889, the Argentine government, presided over by Miguel Juárez Celman gave another turn of screw to the development of the Irish migration to Argentina.

On February 16<sup>th</sup> of that year, nearly 1,800 Irish left the port of Cork for Buenos Aires on the SS Dresden. Michael J. Geraghty states that "the SS Dresden affair", as it was then called, became infamous and was denounced in press, pulpit and Parliament. Argentina, their "land of promise," became "the land of broken promises."<sup>24</sup> It was a direct response to the promotion of Buckley O'Meara and John S. Dillon to the position of Argentine Commissioners to Ireland. Deceiving their compatriots with all kinds of promises, the commissioners used the name of Father Fahy as a moral "guarantor" for the *bona fides* of their immigrant scheme, this despite the fact that this same priest had passed away a full eighteen years previously. When this next group of unfortunate Irish immigrants eventually arrived in Buenos Aires, they were sent to the *Hotel de Inmigrantes* but this was just the beginning of their misfortunes. The Irish religious congregations of the city helped out the new arrivals as did members of the British community. Local lore has it that some of the Irish were so poor and desperate on their arrival that young girls from the community became involved in prostitution and remained in Buenos Aires even after the other Irish had made for the countryside to seek their fortune. In *The Story of the Irish in Argentina*, Thomas Murray deems the Argentine government along with O'Meara and Dillon as the people who bore the main responsibility for this flawed and corrupt immigration scheme, a shameful episode in the history of the Irish-Argentines.

In their history of the several (provisional) immigrants

24. See: Michael John Geraghty, M. (1999, March 17). Argentina, land of broken promises. *Buenos Aires Herald*, p. 5.

hotels as from 1825 through 1911, when the big “definite” *Hotel de Inmigrantes* was inaugurated by President Roque Sáenz Peña, Jorge Ochoa de Eguileor and Eduardo Valdés state that certain European migrants (Germans, people from the Canary Islands) went through very hard circumstances *in their will to settle on this South American land of promises*. Although they do not mention “the SS Dresden affair”, it seems, then, that the Irish one was not an isolated episode. There is a brief reference to the shame of Irish people begging on the streets,<sup>25</sup> and *The Standard* newspaper, dated September 23, 1862, appears regretting the humiliating fact that the Irish had to collect money to help their people, although it was better than allowing them to be crowded together like rams in the home (i.e., the *Asilo de Inmigrantes*, in Corrientes street.)

Just to have an idea of the dimension of this catastrophic, sad operation, it is worthwhile going through the report and reconstruction journalist Sharon Slater offers on Limerick citizens who were victims of “the SS Dresden affair”.<sup>26</sup>

In January 28, 1889, 437 men, women and children gathered at Limerick Train Station to much fanfare and accompanied by a local band. These people were beginning their long journey to Buenos Aires, first they would travel to Queenstown (Cobh), Co. Cork before sailing for Argentina. On board the SS Dresden’s maiden voyage, in 1906 the ship was sold to Turkey and was renamed “Tirimujghian” and in 1914 was sunk by the Russians in the Black Sea.

Slater points out that it was the Archbishop of Cashel who promoted the exodus. She then quotes the *Freeman’s Journal* (Saturday 26, January 1889) describing the arrangements supervised by an Italian and the aforementioned J. S. Dillon whose offices were situated in Cork. “He charged them a small fee for filling up forms and doing other work incidental to the

25. Ochoa de Eguileor, J., & Valdés, E. (1991) *¿Dónde durmieron nuestros abuelos?* Buenos Aires: Fundación Urbe.

26. Slater, S. (2014, July 15). To Buenos Aires or Bust! *Limerick’s Life*. Retrieved on 14 December, 2014 from: <http://limerickslife.com/buenos-aires/>

emigration, but there were hundreds of poor people, whom he did not charge at all.” The word “indifference” used to describe the attitude of most of travelers, plus the fact that they did not have enough money to make a start once they reached their destination, are eloquent in relation to what they thought they could expect from a mysterious “new life”. To these poor people, the word of the Catholic Church was, probably, the sole motor that moved them to travel across the world.

The journalist explains that “by April letters were returning home. Very few of the migrants had obtained employment on arrival and some 400 were sent to an encampment 700 miles from the capital city where they were afflicted with dysentery and in the first 3 months half the children had perished.”

The article includes a reference to the *Portsmouth Evening News* (Monday 29 April, 1889). Under the title “The Argentine, the Last Place on Earth”, the paper includes a letter “received at Limerick from an artisan who went out in the Dresden last February.” The following excerpt needs no additional comments:

When we landed we were sent to the hotel, where we would be cared for. It was then our misfortunes commenced. It was a large wooden building, the form of Griffith’s house, but twice high, and five times large. When we got there it was taken up by 2,000 Italians. There were lounge rooms and wooden bunks, no straw, or, in fact, no place to lay our heads, only on the pavement. Oh, God, it was fearful to think of it. There we lay in heaps... young and old, male and female... all lay together trying to keep heat in them. Oh to think of that night!<sup>27</sup>

After skipping a reference to sanitary conditions, the editor continues reproducing the writer’s account of the disastrous adventure he went through with other “colonists” in Napostá, north of Bahía Blanca.

Along with Father Fahy’s death, this flawed scheme marked the end of the last major bout of 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish migration to the Argentine Republic.

27. *Ibid.*

As it usually happens with small communities in strange or adverse territories, the Irish began working far from the natives and, in their case, rounding the Catholic Church: they had their own chaplains, schools, clubs and libraries. Most of them worked as shepherds and sent their children to Irish-Argentine boarding schools. Education was a central commitment as it is shown by the many institutions, most of which still exist. The Irish Catholic congregations were essential to the education of the Irish-Porteños, which means the preservation of the Irish English language and Irish traditions. I am referring to the Passionist Fathers, the Pallottine Fathers and the Sisters of Mercy. The following general record gives an idea of how instrumental the Irish priests, nuns and laymen considered education for the conservation and promotion of religion, language and culture.

In the city of Buenos Aires, there was an Irish College for Girls (1857-1897), an Irish College for Boys (1862-1864), both of them established by Father Fahy; the Keating Institute (Ladies of Saint Joseph's, 1912-1982); the Mater Misericordiae (Sisters of Mercy, 1897-1977); Saint Brigid's (Irish Catholic Association, 1889); Saint Ciaran's (Sean Healy, 1933); Saint Brendan's (John Scanlan, 1966); and Instituto Monseñor Dillon (Irish Catholic Association, 1993).

In the province of Buenos Aires several other institutions were founded, such as Saint Brendan's (established by Father Michael Leahy in Carmen de Areco, 1869); Saint Patrick's (run by the Pallottine Fathers in Mercedes, 1887); Fahy Farm (founded by the Ladies of Saint Joseph, first in town [1891-1893], then in Capilla del Señor [1893-1950] and, finally, in Moreno [1929]); Saint Paul's (Passionist Fathers, Capitán Sarmiento [1900-1960]); Saint Mary (Sisters of Mercy, San Antonio de Areco, 1901); Clonmacnoise (Sisters of Mercy, San Antonio de Areco, 1922-1977); Michael Ham Memorial College (Passionist Sisters, 1926); Saint Ethnea's (Sisters of Mercy, Bella Vista, 1931); and Cardinal Newman (Christian Brothers, 1948).

The paradox is that some of these institutions, created for the Irish migration segment, mostly composed of poor families working in the camp, are now exclusive educational centers



which offer first class programs such as the International Baccalaureate and/or the Cambridge Examinations (IGCSE, AICE and ESOL) designed for the formation of students who will be part of the ruling class, are willing to continue their studies abroad or dream with leaving the country.

Preceptors (Irish, British or American) like the ones described by William Henry Hudson in *Far Away and Long Ago. A History of My Early Life* (1918) were sometimes an option. An Irish from Venado Porteño recalls the old times when his education was in the hands of those nomadic teachers:

*Para la educación en el campo, supimos tener institutrices para aprender a hablar bien el inglés y todo eso... Había una, Miss Cook, que era inglesa, baja de estatura, muy buena mujer pero muy estricta. Tenía una habitación dentro del casco y nos atendía a nosotros. Era soltera. Después se fue a Inglaterra a pasear en barco, y resulta que se enamoró del capitán, se casó y se quedó viviendo en Inglaterra. No vino nunca más, pero le escribía muchas cartas a mi madre... (...) Venían también los maestros crotos, había uno que creo era Welch de apellido, y andaba como los linyeras... ¡Pero era maestro! A nosotros nos dio unas cuantas clases en una mesa que ponía mi padre. Llegaba todos los años, pasaba una época en casa haciendo de maestro, juntaba unos mangos, y se iba derecho al pueblo, a Maggiolo, al boliche, a gastar la plata.<sup>28</sup>*

From oral and traditional testimonies we know that the Irish waves of migration occasionally included Protestants;<sup>29</sup>

28. For our education in the *camp*, we used to have governesses to learn English properly and all that. There was a Miss Cook, a small little British lady, she was good but very strict. She had a room in the ranch and she took care of us. Then she went in a ship off to England, and it happened that she fell in love with the Captain, she married him and remained living in England. She never came back, but wrote letters to my mother... (...) We were also visited by very poor teachers. There was one whose surname, I think, was Welch, a kind of a tramp... But he was a teacher! He taught us a few classes in a table placed by my father. He came every year, he spent some time making out he was a teacher and after collecting a few *pesos* he cleared away straight to town, to Maggiolo, to the bar, to spend his money. (See: Landaburu, R. (1995). *Irlandeses. Eduardo Casey, vida y obra*. Venado Tuerto: Fondo Editor Mutual Venado Tuerto, p. 137).

29. Out of a list of 886 passengers who arrived to Buenos Aires in the ship

it wasn't strange that some of them would conveniently move to the Roman Catholic flock. Nevertheless, for the spiritual assistance of Protestants and, allow me to call them crypto-Protestants,<sup>30</sup> Ministers were sent off to Buenos Aires. The first one was John Armstrong who arrived in 1820. All of them preserved their unity by relying on the English language which, in fact, was not their original one.

Far from social activities, camp duties promoted an essential solitude. Alcohol was an escape, although the foundation of a family appeared as the natural and positive option. Family, therefore, became the first guardian of Irish-English language and Irish culture. Irish-Gaelic words used to appear intermixed within their English-Irish speech, and the settlers' English was the one they had spoken in Westmeath, Wicklow, Wexford, Cork, Longford and Tipperary. Later on, as we will see, they incorporated not only Spanish words but expressions taken from the rural Argentine slang. In a sense, there was an Irish contribution to the formation of that Spanish dialect which is the Argentine language. From another point of view, it is clear that fluctuations of the Irish-English language reflect the ups and downs of their slow integration, adaptation and assimilation into the Argentine culture. Although it could sound a bit too obvious, it is essential to remark that the process I am describing and whose real existence is my endeavor to show, has never been (never could have been) successive, continuous, uninterrupted and homogenous. In the course of human changes or transformations, the past pokes out persistently, delaying and shaping its full development. The existential course of integration, adaptation and even assimilation, and, naturally, its linguistic correlate, reveals, indeed, interpolations and coexistences. Predominant evidences will define each stage.

The following list gives an account of texts commonly used in

City of Dresden, 147 were inscribed as "non Catholic". (See: Immigrant Ships. Transcribers Guild. Irish to Argentina 1822-1889 (s.d.). Retrieved on 14 December 2014 from: [http://immigrantships.net/irish\\_arg1889a.html](http://immigrantships.net/irish_arg1889a.html)).

30. "Crypto" or "crypt": hidden, secret.

Irish-Argentine educational institutions up to the beginning of the last century, a legacy that had much to do with the formation of more than one Irish-Porteño generation: *Imitation of Christ*, *How to Converse with God*, *Voices from Purgatory*, *The Catholic Girl in the World*, *Life of St. Paul of the Cross*, *Life of Don Bosco*, *Life of St. Patrick*, *Royal Readers* (Christian Brothers School Books), poems by Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Moore, William Wordsworth, Oliver Goldsmith, and novels by Charles Dickens and William Thackeray. From the pulpit or on horseback, priests were always supervising and controlling readings.

A brief survey of the libraries of the Passionist monastery in Capitán Sarmiento and Holy Cross church and retreat, in Buenos Aires (now dismantled), showed the interests and directions of the congregation, and, consequently, of the Irish-Argentine community. I went through both of them years ago, and, at random, without considering theology and philosophy treatises, I took note of the following texts: *The Irish*, by Sean O'Faolain; *Tales of the Pampas*, and *Rambles in Eirinn*, by William Bulfin; *14 Short Stories*, by Liam O'Flaherty; *The Story of Ireland*, by A. M. Sullivan; *Life and Times of Daniel O'Connell*; *A Dictionary of Irish Biography*, by Henry Boylan; *Ballads of a Country Boy*; *The Invincible Irish*, by J. C. Walsh; *Songs of Glen Na Mona*; *Ireland's Fight for Freedom*, by George Creel; *Dances of Ireland*; *Folktales of the Irish Countryside*, by Kevin Danaher; *Irish Street Ballads*; *Quotations from P. H. Pearse*; *Songs of the Gael*; *The Peoples of Ireland*, by Liam de Paor; *In Search of Ireland*, by H. V. Morton; *The Story of the Irish Race*, by Seumas MacManus; *Insula Sanctorum et Doctorum*, by John Healy; *The Great Irish Famine*, by Cormac Ó Gráda; *The Blarney Ballads*, by C. L. Graves; *The Irish Race in the Past and Present*, by the Rev. Aug. J. Thebaud S.J.; *Sir Thomas More*, by M. C. Monroe; *Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, by Donald Mac Leod; *Reasonable Service or Why I Believe*, by D. I. Lanslots; *The Priests and Poets of Ireland*, by Colonel James E. McGee; *Life of Blessed Oliver Plunkett*, by Fr. Thomas Donlon CP; *Stories from Irish History* (for children); *Songs of the Gael in Tongue of the Gael*; *Around The Boree Log*, by John O'Brien; *A History of Ireland*, by Edmund Curtis, and *Saint Thomas Becket*, by John Morris, among many others.

Irish-Argentine churches, monasteries, schools, hospitals, homes, clubs and newspapers have all left valuable historical accounts of this 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrant Irish presence in Argentina. The legacy of the Irish can also be found in their contributions to culture, religion, farming, business and even politics... A unique and valuable *corpus* of literature exists as created by these Irish-Porteños, one that reveals their everyday living conditions, their aspirations, their outlook on life, and their gradual incorporation.

Anyone who visits the cemeteries of cities like Monte, Navarro, Mercedes, Luján, Rojas and San Antonio de Areco will find tombs with Irish inscriptions in English, perhaps in Spanish, or combining English, Latin and even Irish-Gaelic. At the cemetery in San Pedro, Buenos Aires, I saw inscriptions like the following:

In hoc signo vinces.

O Lord have mercy on the soul of Robert Fallon.  
Native of Banagher, King's County, Ireland, who died  
January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1868.

Sacred to the Memory of Patrick O'Reardon and Mary  
Lynch O'Reardon  
Natives of County Clare, Ireland, Patrick died June 28<sup>th</sup>  
1890, aged 81 years.

In loving memory of Kate and Sarah Nally.  
Kate died on 28<sup>th</sup> of May, Sarah on 5<sup>th</sup> June of 1894. Aged 20  
and 16 years.  
Natives of San Pedro, Buenos Aires.

At Venado Tuerto's cemetery, I came across many Irish tombs:

James Dalton  
Born 29/6/1813 – Died 15/9/1888 and  
his wife Bridget Murray de Dalton  
Born 2/2/1826 – Died 3/5/1898.  
“Dust thou art to dust returnest, was not spoken of the  
soul.”  
Erected by their loving children.

Michael Heavy  
Born in Ballymore, Ireland. Died in Venado Tuerto  
15/11/1899.

John Kehoe  
Who was born in Davistown, Co. Wexford, Ireland, and  
died in Sancti Spiritu on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1909, Aged 68 years.

In sad y (sic) loving memory Dr. James J. Byrne  
Who departed this life in the 22 day of jannuari (sic) 1925  
at the age of 56 years. RIP.

Norah Wade de Basualdo  
Fuiste madre, fuiste maestra, y el arte fue tu vocación, tu  
pueblo que no te olvida. 29/7/1967

In his memoir entitled *Pantalones cortos*, Arturo Jauretche  
refers to the Irish in Lincoln, Buenos Aires, and writes:

Coincidió este momento con las grandes inmigraciones  
irlandesas y vascas de origen político-social. Ambos eran  
pueblos pastores y como tales entraron en el país. La forma de  
trabajo más frecuente era que el ovejero recibía el “piño” al  
tercio de las pariciones y esquilas con lo que a los tres años  
tenía majada propia casi tan grande como la original y la lana  
de tres zafras. Podía entonces comprar campo que aún era  
barato; la valorización vino después, con el frigorífico cuando  
los vacunos retornaron a los campos de pastos blandos mientras  
la extensión del ferrocarril facilitaba el desplazamiento de la  
oveja tierra adentro.

Esa corriente pobladora de vascos e irlandeses se enriqueció  
en la medida que compraron campos a tiempo y en las mejores  
zonas. Se produjo además un fenómeno social: cuando llegaron  
los españoles y los italianos en cantidad, ya gran parte de los  
vascos e irlandeses eran propietarios y se habían enriquecido;  
sus hijos empezaban a ser doctores y esto trajo que fueran  
mirados en más (...).<sup>31</sup>

31. This period matched up with the great Irish and Basque migrations of  
social and political origin. People of both countries were shepherds and it was  
in that condition that they came to this countryside. According to the regular  
working transaction, they received what was known as “piño”, at a third part

Based on regular and popular information, the writer's report, together with others, fed the mistaken idea that all Irish-Argentines were well off. The truth is that most of them belonged to the segment Jaureche defines as "late comers" which included those losers who returned to the city, where they were able to make a living in international corporations or railway companies, thanks to their knowledge of the English language (Irish English, in fact).

Since the successive waves of Irish migrants were not able to speak Spanish, after settling in a boarding house, the first thing male migrants would do was try to get in touch with their compatriots; chaplains were functional to this connection which generally led them out to the countryside. Courageous Irish girls usually stopped at the Irish Girls' Home or in boarding houses for them, as it can be seen in *You'll Never Go Back*, the novel by Katherine Nevin.

Nevin was not the only writer who told the story. William Bulfin left an extraordinary socio-linguistic document in the form of short stories under the general title of *Tales of the Pampas*.

There were other writers. A gifted poetess famous for the songs and stories she wrote for children, María Elena Walsh (1930-2011) published a *memoir* entitled *Novios de antaño* (*Old Fashioned Sweethearts*) in 1990. The final section of this memoir – "Grandmother Agnes" – consists of a collection of family letters on the life of both Irish and British immigrants to Buenos Aires during the 1880s, the same period covered by Nevin in her novel. Interestingly, Agnes reports that

of parturitions and shearing with which, after three years, they had their own flock, nearly as big as the original one, and wool of about three harvests' time. Then they were able to buy lands still cheap at that time. The increase in value came afterwards, with the meat processing plants, when the cattle was sent off to the grazing lands, at the time when the expansion of the railways promoted the displacement of sheep into the interior.

That Irish and Basque stream of settlers became rich, to a certain extent, while they were able to buy land in time and in the best areas. In addition, this situation created a social phenomenon: when Italians and Spaniards arrived massively, most of the Irish and Basques were wealthy proprietors; their children became doctors, and, because of this, they were highly regarded (...).

many rural Irish sheep traders, who made a lot of money on arrival in Argentina, subsequently behaved like aristocrats within their own community and felt free to exploit some of their compatriots. She also says that, being a Protestant, it was not easy for her to overcome the difficulties associated with her determination to marry a Catholic man. Alcohol, she asserts, was a real curse for many in both the Irish and British communities. She mentions that newspapers such as *The Standard* and *The Southern Cross* were a great source of consolation for the lonesome Irish immigrant. Another writer not much mentioned by the critics is Enrique Anderson Imbert (1910-2000), an academic and a Professor at Harvard University. A fiction writer, he also wrote stories which drew on aspects of Irish culture, albeit that they had little to do with the theme of migration or immigration as relating to the Irish-Argentine community. Anderson Imbert's homage to his Irish antecedents is expressed in the form of stories of a fantastical nature. In "*Mi prima May*" ("My cousin May"), the plot details the activities of a mysterious Leprechaun; in "*Patricio O'Hara, el libertador*" ("Patrick O'Hara, the liberator"), he links aspects of Celtic mythology with the native Argentine folklore. In "*Mi hermana Rita*" ("My Sister Rita") he takes advantage of his knowledge of ancient Irish myths. Anderson Imbert's narratives trace the inevitable disappearance of the Irish-Porteños as a separate or "isolated" community and celebrate their assimilation within the rich tapestry that is Argentine culture.

The list should also include the names of Bernardo Carey, a well-known playwright; Eduardo Carroll, poet and novelist; Alfredo Casey, poet, playwright and a very able translator of Pádraic Pearse's work; Teresa Deane Reddy, author of a bilingual collection of short stories – "*De sueños y encuentros*" ("Destiny and Dreams") – where, and with reference to many Irish-Porteño marriages, she states that "They built families without much romance and I'd say that some of them without love, but their marriages lasted, not precisely to uphold the famous mandate: 'Till death do us apart'"; Jesuit Guillermo Furlong, a scholar who has studied neglected aspects of the Argentine cultural history such as

the life of Thomas Field, the first Irishman ever to step foot in South America; poets Luis Alberto Murray and Esteban Moore; Ana O'Neill, an effective mystery writer like her colleague Alicia Plante; Graciela Cabal, well known for her stories on Irish immigrants; essayists like Ramón Doll and Aníbal Ford; and Eduardo Cormick, author of a fictional version of the life of Admiral William Brown.

Despite the fact that their works do not refer to Irish subjects, Pacho O'Donnell (1941) and Benito Lynch (1880-1951) are big names, the latter being the author of the classic Argentine novel *El inglés de los güesos* (1922).

As in Nevin's book we identify the Irish will of adaptation, and integration in Bulfin's tales, it is in Rodolfo J. Walsh's narrative and lifetime that the assimilation of Irish Argentina into the history and fate of the country appears as a new reality and, consequently, as the end of the Irish-Porteño as a secluded community.

Press played an important role in keeping the Irish community united and informed. The first English newspaper in South America was *The Weekly Standard*, then *The Standard*; although it had been founded by two Irish brothers (Edward and Michael Mulhall), the paper was devoted to business and it was clearly a pro-British medium.

Other Irish-Porteño newspapers were: *The Irish Argentine*, founded in Mercedes by Father Bernard Feeney, in 1866. Oliver Marshall writes that Father Feeney, from County Roscommon, "established (...) Argentina's first industrial school. The school was created as the non-fee-paying wing of the Pallottine order's St. Patrick's college to provide orphaned boys opportunities to learn a trade. Feeney secured printing equipment (...). Edited by Feeney, *The Irish Argentine* was described by *The Southern Cross* in its 6 January 1888 edition as being 'a strenuous defender of Catholicism as well as Irish and Argentine interests'";<sup>32</sup> *The Hiberno Argentine Review*, owned and edited by John Nelson, from Kildare, was "a non political weekly" headed by a Latin

32. Marshall, O. (1996). *The English Language Press in Latin America*. London: Institute of Latin American Studies, p. 1.



motto: “*In necesarilla Unitas, In dubiis Libertas, In omnibus Caritas*”, later on absorbed by *The Argentine Review*; *Fianna*, an Irish nationalist magazine, and *The Southern Cross*. The latter is the paper that better represented (and still stands for) the fluctuations and facts of the Irish-Argentine community. Founded by Mgr. Patrick J. Dillon in 1875, *TSC* was much more than an informative organ, it was instrumental to the unity of the Irish in Argentina. It also worked as a true thermometer of the situations of the Irish in their slow process of integration, adaptation and assimilation. Concerning language, it gave an account of a linguistic development in which transportations, expropriations, neologisms, archaisms, Spanish interpolations and Spanglish expressions revealed what was going on within the Irish-Argentine community. Little by little, *The Southern Cross* became bilingual and, in the end, it was published mainly in Spanish. William Bulfin, author of the already mentioned collection of short stories called *Tales of the Pampas*; Gerald Foley, spokesman of the hard times Ireland was going through in her struggle for liberation; Father Juan Santos Gaynor, a great promoter of Argentine culture within the Irish-Porteño community; and Father Federico Richards, who recovered readers who had lost their English language by editing the paper in Spanish, and who fought against the dictatorship during the seventies, were the most prominent editors.

Subtly in her contribution to the Nation, Irish Argentina is still alive. In the past, the Irish-American movies by John Ford, the voices of John McCormack and Bing Crosby, bishop Fulton Sheen’s words, popular classic songs such as “When Irish Eyes are Smiling”, “Come Back to Erin”, “Wearing O’ the Green”, “Danny Boy” or “The Rose of Tralee” and “Faith of Our Fathers” during St. Patrick’s Day, were symbols that revealed the essence of a community traditionally prepared to receive and share. The cultural heritage is always growing. Now it is the turn of Enya, U2, the theatre of Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney’s verbal music... And words, always in diachronic movement, revealing the identity of one of the communities which is already part of the Nation.

Perhaps it is the strong Celtic sense of identity that, after such

a long time, allows us to go on speaking of Irish Argentina; not of the visible and disappearing community, but of the invisible one, which is generous and grateful, and silently bears the immemorial legacy which is in the essence of that medley of different cultures called Argentina.

A main subject related to the Irish-Porteños has to do with language. What happened to their language? We'll go through that central and revealing topic in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### English Language Variations: The Hiberno-Argentine Case

#### 1. *Language and Identity*

A monosyllabic grumble is usually our first oral utterance in life, and it is, frequently, our last vocal expression. Between these two existential facts there is a segment, life, during which we get in touch with what is called reality. And it is that essential human invention called language the means we employ to give names to it, to what surrounds us; it is also the tool we use to address others, expressing ideas and feelings.

There is an intimate and sometimes ineffable connection between identity and the way human communities create, develop and preserve their language. It has to do with our vision of existence and, in more than one way, with a certain philosophy of life. Words, synonyms, metaphors, points of view and even syntax reveal ways of understanding the world and of expressing our consciousness of it. Our words expose an identity to which we are, also, contributors. As Noam Chomsky put it:

Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the *manner* in which the principles of generation are used is free and *infinitely varied*. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation. The normal use of language and the acquisition of language depend on what Humboldt calls the fixed form of language, a system of generative processes that is rooted in the nature of the human mind and constrains but does not determine the free creations of normal intelligence or, at a higher and more original level, of the great writer or thinker. (Emphasis added.)<sup>33</sup>

Language is always being shaped by people who speak it, embodying their personal and communitarian history.

33. Chomsky, N. (1996, March). Language and Freedom. *Resonance*. University of Mumbai, pp. 99-100.

Successive generations have invented, borrowed and modified words and structures in order to give expression to their spiritual and material yearnings. Individual speeches, then, are micro expressions of the ethnic community as a whole. Unexpected transformations go through words in their movements from different geographies and within diverse communities and speakers. In the case I am examining, individuals, in their process of integration, adaptation and assimilation (Irish → Irish-Argentine → Argentine), constructed different identities, an experience in which intermarriage played a central role, creating hybrid identities, a vital and enriching reality within the Argentine culture; through the Spanish or Argentine language (never stable, always on the move), local schooling and education completed, in a decisive way, the task of sweeping out the Hiberno-Argentine variation.

Although we can assume more than one social identity that will depend on familiar, academic or professional circumstances, and even more than one personal identity (authentic or disguised), on the deep level we are our own speech.

“National” language(s) are taught in schools as subjects and are also used in schools to teach other subjects. For some children this means learning to read and write, and then speak, a different language from the language of the home (or a new variety of their home language), and in doing so there may be implicit or explicit encouragement to forget the language of the home. Such children are not learning their “mother tongue”, and because of the link between language and identity, this can mean weakening or even forgetting the social identity created in the home, a regional identity or an identity brought from another country.<sup>34</sup>

This is true in relation to most migrant communities in our country, and it is partially true when referring to English-Speaking communities on account of the commercial

34. Byram, M. (2006, October 16-18). Language and Identities. Presented at *Languages of Schooling: towards a Framework for Europe*. Council for Europe, Language Policy Division, Intergovernmental Conference. Strasbourg, France, p. 5.

importance of the tongue and because the English language, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was becoming, and finally became, what is known as *lingua franca*.

To better understand the language of the Irish and their descendants in Argentina, every so often considered a dialect, and, at times, by extension, called Irish-Porteño, a survey on Irish language and Irish-English appears to be convenient. Irish language and Irish-English, related to its cultural context and that of the host country are, actually, the essential constituents of this Argentine contribution to the Tower of Babel. Ethnolect or Ethnolinguistics state that the way in which ethnic groups interact moulds their usage of language. This is what appears in the development of this case. Being a minor scale migrant community, and due to its final assimilation, the Irish-Porteño dialect or ethnolect ended up being cleared by the Spanish or Argentine language. The rest are isolated, occasional expressions and pidgins used by elder speakers in extinction, never the expression of a whole or significant community. As their compatriots, new generations who claim Irish descent study English as a second language for professional or cultural purposes, Standard English, the syllabuses planned by national and, more likely, international language centers.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. *The Irish Language*<sup>36</sup>

A tribe known as the Indo-Europeans lived in Central Europe about 5000 BC. They had their own language: the Indo-European (a hypothetical ancestor-language.) They were farmers, and it is believed that around 3000 BC they invented the wheel, a simple creation that allowed them to move from their original land.

35. It is known that accent can show your social origin and education; although speakers in the past of this story would disguise their accent in order to appear far from certain social groups or, even, to make out they were British, that is not the case of the present generations of Irish-Porteños English speakers. In another sense, the will of many of them to recover the English language is linked with the idea of recapturing their cultural identity (in spite of the fact that their original language was not English but Irish.)

36. Since in Ireland the expression “Gaelic” is generally used by those hostile to the language, I will refer to the Celtic language of Ireland as “Irish”.

The Indo-Europeans who travelled to Britain were the Celts; the Irish, the Scottish, the Welsh and the Bretons belong to this branch of the Indo-European family. People living in Wales, Western Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall and Brittany (in Northern France), then, consider themselves Celts.

The Celtic form that would become Irish was introduced in Ireland by the Gaels (about 300 BC). Diodorus Siculus, the Greek historian who lived between 90-21 BC, referring to the “deep”, “harsh” voices of the Celts, says: “In conversation they use few words and speak in riddles, for the most part hinting at things and leaving a great deal to be understood.”<sup>37</sup> I will go back to the oblique character of the Irish language hinted in this reference. Obliqueness, in fact, persisted in Irish-English and even in the Irish-Porteño variation.

It later expanded to other parts of the British islands. It happened that, little by little, these language expressions separated from Irish and became different languages.

It was during the appearance of Christianity, as from AD 431-432 on, that the Irish started writing. The name of the country, Ireland, reflects this particular encounter of cultures: Éire + land (Éire derives from the Old Irish word Érin, which was the name of a Gaelic goddess.)

It is considered that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Irish was the language of almost everybody in Ireland. And when in the 17<sup>th</sup> century aristocracy was attacked and isolated the Irish language started decaying. Irish continued in the countryside, but the language of the new colonists was English and in its aim of annihilating the identity of the Irish people, it was their main duty to smash their original language.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a strong Romantic movement that tried to restore the Irish language; William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge were among the principal head leaders. Nowadays, only 3% of the Irish population (most of them in the countryside) employs the Irish language as their daily communication tool.

37. Quoted by Loreto Todd (2000) in *Green English*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press, p. 17.

### 3. *Irish-English*

The Celts were the only people in Britain for over 2,000 years. Then the Romans invaded England and the Celts lived in Scotland and Wales. Only a few Latin words entered the Celtic language. The Romans left Britain in AD 410. Four decades after, the Angles and Saxons arrived. They came from what is now known as Holland, Denmark and Germany. Their language was “Old English” (or *Englisc*).

Latin reappeared in AD 597, when Augustine brought Christianity to Britain. Numerous Latin and Greek words invaded Old English. Latin was one of the great foreign linguistic elements in the conformation of the English Language. The early Church voices are mostly of Greco-Latin origin. Education was based on Latin and the circulation of books in English was slow. Scholars considered Latin the proper means of literature (Thomas More’s *Utopia* was published in Latin in 1516 and not translated into the English language till 1551). The great exception was the circulation of the Bible, in different translations before the publication, in 1611, of the Authorized Version. The Bible was the principal reading in all classes, and because of its moral strength it was studied and reread all over the country, promoting and dignifying the English language.

Between 750 and 1050 new visitors attacked Britain: the Vikings. They came from Scandinavia.

A landmark in the history of the English language took place in 1066 when William, the French duke, beat the English king, Harold, at the Battle of Hastings. French words entered the English language.

In the next 200 years, Old English (or Anglo Saxon, a very complicated language) gradually changed and became Middle English, looking for simplification. After the introduction of printing and the circulation of parts of the Bible, it began to develop into early Modern English.

In relation to my approach, and in opposition to what I will describe as Irish-English, Robert Burchfield goes to the essence of the connection of Standard English and the Celts by assuring that (it) “is little influenced by the languages of the Celtic speakers whose ancestors moved to the British Isles long

before any Saxons or Vikings appeared.”<sup>38</sup>

It is a fact that the Irish speak English in a different way. Words, syntax, idioms and pronunciation (“the Irish brogue”) reflect the story of Ireland and England’s traumatic relationship. In his Introduction to his *Dictionary of Hiberno-English*, Terence Patrick Dolan defines this phenomenon as a “macaronic dialect, a mixture of Irish and English, sometimes in the same word (e.g. ‘girleen’, ‘maneen’, etc.)”. And he states that “Hiberno English is a conservative form of English, which sometimes preserves the older forms and the older pronunciations of words derived from Early Modern English, roughly from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries –the period in which the English settlements in Ireland became more established (...).”<sup>39</sup>

Irish-English or Hiberno-English, then, is a variation of the English language which reflects Irish influence on every linguistic level.

Some of the expressions that survived in the Irish-English of the migration process in Argentina are:

- a) Probably influenced by the Spanish language, the regular use of the definite article which is not used in other varieties. “I received a letter from *the* Argentina.”
- b) “The tendency to pronounce ‘c’ and ‘g’ as if they were followed by a ‘y’, so that *cat* sounds like ‘kyat’ and *garden* like ‘gyarden’” (Todd, 2000, p. 83).
- c) “Speakers of Irish carried over into Hiberno-English many of the rhythms of their Gaelic mother tongue. Among the most marked of these is the use of an unstressed *an* at the beginning of a question.” (Todd, 2000, p. 83).
- d) The use of emphatic pronouns, as in: “What about yourself?”; “Is that you?”
- e) Examining William Bulfin’s *Tales of the Pampas*, Susan Wilkinson stresses expressions that came directly from

38. Burchfield, R. *The English Language*. Oxford: OUP, p. 125.

39. Nolan, T. (Ed.). (2006). *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, p. xxiii.



the Midlands: “‘Wan’ means ‘one’, ‘wance’ is ‘once’, ‘tay’ is ‘tea’, ‘yez’ means ‘you’ (plural), ‘sez’ is common for ‘says’. The ‘t’ in the middle of a word is frequently thickened as in ‘sthraight’ for ‘straight’, etc. while ‘d’ at the end of a word is often pronounced as a ‘t’, such as ‘beyant’ for ‘beyond’. ‘When’, ‘men’, ‘them’, etc. are written as they were pronounced (‘whin’, ‘min’, ‘thim’)”. (Wilkinson, 1997, Introduction, not paginated).

f) Absence of the verb “have”. Several deviations from Standard English syntax are due to the absence of a verb “have” in Irish. The most noted example is the construction with “after” in place of the English “have” in expressions such as “I’m just after eating my dinner.” (...) Standard English: “I’ve just eaten my dinner.” (Dolan, 2006, p. xxiv). “The English present perfect tense may be expressed in Gaelic in two different ways, which have, however, not exactly the same meaning. If one wants to say a thing has happened just a moment ago, he will use the following construction (...): He has just written (...) (literally: *he is after writing*). In Anglo-Irish there often occurs a construction with *after* which is virtually but a translation of this Gaelic idiom.” (Van Hamel, 1977, p. 276).

g) “British English perfect and pluperfect are often replaced with the past tense in Hiberno-English (...) giving such patterns as ‘Did any of you find my pen?’ instead of ‘Have any of you found my pen?’ (...) Substitution is also found for the English perfect and pluperfect (...) ‘Where were you’ (in place of ‘Where have you been?’)” (Dolan, 2006, pp. xxiv-xxv).

h) The use of “will” instead of “shall”. In her *Introduction to Irish English*, Carolina P. Amador-Moreno writes: “In the context of literary production, the use of *will* is known to have been corrected by Sean O’Faolain’s English publisher, who felt the need to ‘purge’ the dialect contained in some of the author’s novels and sent him twenty pages of corrective notes for a manuscript where he indicated that he was not ‘using the King’s English’

(quoted from Crogham, 1986, p. 262). O'Faolain's case contrasts with Oscar Wilde's conscious request to his editor to 'correct' his provincialisms: in a letter to Coulson Kernahan, Wilde asks him to 'look after my «wills» and «shalls» in proof. I am Celtic in my use of these words, not English (see Hart-Davis 1989: 94)." (Amador-Moreno, 2010, p. 45).

i) Employment of singular forms of the verb with plural subjects.

j) Usual omission of the relative pronoun "that".

k) Use of the preposition *on* "where the speaker is presented as the victim of a negative action or event." (Amador Moreno, 2010, p. 47). "They put the fault *on* me."

l) "We often find in Anglo-Irish the words *in it* where they hardly seem to have any meaning at all. In this case they are a translation of the Irish word *ann*. (...) For its use the Christian Brothers give the following rule (cf. Christ. Br. Grammar, p. 277): *ann* used predicatively after *tá* (= is) means 'in existence, extant'. This must be the real meaning of *in it* in Anglo-Irish too." (Van Hamel, 1977, p. 286). In Buenos Aires, the expression "not to be all in it" was rather frequent when referring to mad people. "She is not all in it."

m) Expressing the indirect nature of the Irish language, there is a frequent use of litotes and negative constructions. "Colum McCann is not my cup of tea."; "She's not a fool."

In more than one way, conveying the cultural composition and the history of the inhabitants of the Emerald Isle, Latin, Norman-French, English and Irish were the four current languages by the end of the twelfth century. It is in this context that Irish-English became a variation that in a poetical and beautiful way has been defined as "Green English". It was in this linguistic context that during the late 1800s and early 1900s, in Buenos Aires, one could find in the papers ads, like the following, published by *The Standard* on January 7, 1912:

Wanted, at once, a young nursemaid of smart appearance who must either be English or speak English correctly, to look after child of one year. Irish nursemaids need not apply. Salary \$ 60 per month. Apply at Calle Rivadavia 3391.

In August 2013, during the VIII Symposium of Irish Studies (ABEI), at the Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, Dr Laura Izarra conducted an open interview with Irish writer Hugo Hamilton and me; the topic was “Migration and Identity”. I hereby reproduce a few fragments connected with the problem I am describing:

H.H.: “I’ve heard him (Banville) compare the way Irish people speak to a stained glass window. You can’t see what’s beyond it, you can only see the colors. I think that is a fascinating way of describing our language. We talk and say nothing. I think it is one of the things that drove my mother mad because in Germany they have a very strong tradition in which language is used to say what you mean. Things are said in very concrete terms and the language is built up with a technical proficiency by using specific words. I mean with longer words. I think the longest words you have in any language are in the German language because they just stuff all the words together. The Irish don’t do that. They have a way of avoiding the actual hard facts that also gives the Irish people this great stained glass quality that John Banville mentioned.

J.J.D.: Perhaps the idea is that they think that words are not here at all to express certain realities. That’s why they use metaphors, and that’s why they have so many good poets...

H.H.: We run into metaphors, we run into stories rather than explanations. I think that’s a great quality in the Irish that we allow each other to fantasize around the facts with stories. We are quick to answer questions with more questions, and we answer stories with another story, rather than saying “Yes, I understand what you said there.” We don’t agree with each other very much. We just keep the story going. And if I say that the Irish people say nothing, it’s meant as flattery because it holds a great gift of storytelling.

(...) The Irish made up their story. Ok, it’s based on facts from history, but it is in a way a story we tell ourselves in the same way that anybody’s nationality or identity is a story that

is presented. This wonderful fabrication that I call the Irish identity is a very fluid one, one that is changing very rapidly now because of migration.

J.J.D.: I like what you said in the sense that identity sometimes is a construction. We know, more than ever, that the Argentine Irishness is, nowadays, nothing but fiction, but we like that and we enjoy it. We are the last of the Mohicans.

(...) I spent most of my life within the Irish community, which is not only fictional but it is also a minority. How many Irish-Porteños live in Argentina? Nobody knows. But if you go to the Embassy and ask, the answer will be half a million. *The Southern Cross* sells some thousand copies, no more than that. This means that about four thousand, five thousand people read it. That's the visible Irish community. The one I know, the one I lived with. The other one, the invisible one, is the one that counts. The one that contributes not to the Irish identity but to the Argentine identity is invisible.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. *The Irish language in Argentina*

It is hard to quantify up to what level the Irish language was transported to the River Plate. It must not have been relevant, since most of the Irish migrants came from the Midlands, an area where the language was hardly spoken, plus the fact that Irish was in general decay as from the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a consequence of Henry VIII's Act for the English Order, Plantations, the Battle of Kinsale (1601), the Flight of the Earls (1607) and the British systematic and destructive actions against the Celtic culture.

But it is known that the clergy preserved the language and, up to a certain point, practiced it with their fellow countrymen here in the Argentine pampas. In his historical account of the Irish in Venado Tuerto (province of Santa Fe), known as *Irlandeses en la Pampa Gringa. Curas y ovejeros*, Roberto E. Landaburu writes that the use of Irish-Gaelic was rather common during the missions and that the priests used to address their flock in Irish. He also says that, in order to distinguish it from the

40. Eliggi, M., & Obert, G. (2015). *Actas del IV Congreso Internacional de la Sociedad de Estudios Irlandeses y Latinoamericanos (SILAS) y del VIII Simposio de Estudios Irlandeses en Sudamérica (ABEI)*. Santa Rosa: Ediciones Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, pp. 249-264.

English language, in different kinds of documents the language is mentioned as “idioma irlandés”. Although he never met an Irish language speaker, many of his interviewees recalled some of their ancestors speaking Irish, but in limited familiar sessions as in Ireland, where the language had been banned.<sup>41</sup> It was common that a same family included members who were Irish speakers and others who were not able to understand a single word. Alec Delaney recalls his childhood in the countryside, in Monte (Buenos Aires) and his grandmother introducing Irish words in her English speech, the one she preferred. *Gaol-sao* was a repeated expression. I got many other reports describing similar experiences.<sup>42</sup>

Mícheál de Barra (Michael Barry) is the author of *Gaeil i dTír na nGauchos (Irish People in the Land of the Gauchos)* an introduction to the Ireland-River Plate emigration he wrote for readers of Irish while living as a Christian Brother at the Cardinal Newman School, in Buenos Aires, during 1970-1975. In touch with him by mail, he sent me his comments and reflections on what happened to the Irish language in Argentina.

It is likely that Dr. Michael O’Gorman (from Ennis, Co. Clare) and Admiral Brown (from rural Mayo) knew and understood Irish, as did many of the Irish soldiers captured during those invasions of Buenos Aires by the English in the early 1800s.

The Penal Laws impoverished the Irish Catholic population. By 1835, it is estimated that there were 4 million Irish speakers, mostly poor peasants. It is therefore very likely that many of

41. Landaburu, R. (2006). *Irlandeses en la pampa gringa. Curas y ovejeros*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, pp. 205- 206.

42. I have a letter from Yolanda Gilligan de Ferrario in which she tells the following story: “*Cuando mi padre empezó a trabajar fuera de su casa, fue resero. Su bilingüismo lo produjo la necesidad. Para complicar las cosas, si bien en casa se hablaba inglés y español, cuando los viejos irlandeses se reunían a jugar al forty-five, se comunicaban en gaélico. Los jóvenes quedaban al margen del código y nada entendían*”. (When my father started working out of our place, he became a cowhand. His bilingualism, then, was a consequence of necessity. To make things worse, although at home we used to speak English and Spanish, when the old Irish got together to play the forty-five, they spoke Gaelic. Ignoring the code, the youngsters understood nothing.) See Delaney, 2006, p. 13.

those who emigrated to Argentina in the 1840s and 1850s were Irish speakers or bilingual. I would be very surprised if Fr Fahy was not bilingual (...) Sadly, the decimation of the poorer classes (small tenant farmers and farm laborers) during the Great Famine in the late 1840s and early 1850s through starvation and emigration radically reduced the number of Irish speakers. There were communities of Irish speakers in the slums of New York, Boston and Liverpool. Irish became a badge of poverty at home in Ireland and abroad. Parents wanted their children to speak English in preparation for emigration to the USA, England and Australia. Emigrants wanted to leave this badge of poverty behind as soon as possible. I suspect that this is what happened in the River Plate area. I believe that a section of the better off Irish in Buenos Aires liked to perceive themselves as “English” and speaking the language of the impoverished did not fit in with that image. In the language of the young people today, it would not be “cool”. English = doing well; Irish = poverty and ignorance. No contest. There is evidence of families from county Clare in Argentina, who were proud of their language. Michael Dinneen, who took over *The Southern Cross* after William Bulfin, was a native Irish speaker and an Irish scholar. The nationalist movements in Ireland were reflected in Buenos Aires. This included the revival of the Irish language and the formation of hurling clubs. In the 1890s and early 1900s, there was a large branch of the Gaelic League (the aim of which was to revive the Irish language) in Buenos Aires, with membership of over 100.<sup>43</sup>

And again:

(...) There were two other elements in the fading away of the language. Firstly, the establishment of the “national school system” (primary education), set up by the British Government in 1831. The language of instruction was English, despite the fact that many children only spoke Irish. In some places children wore a *bata scóir* on a string around their necks. A notch was cut on the stick each time a child was heard speaking in Irish. At the end of the day punishment (usually physical) was administered in proportion to the number of notches. The best translation of *bata scóir* is “tally-stick”. Secondly, and sadly,

43. Email message dated June 15, 2015.

the Catholic Church was not well-disposed towards the Irish language in many cases. Even Daniel O'Connell, a native Irish speaker himself, discouraged the use of the language. Most of the poorer rural emigrants to Buenos Aires from Ireland would have been products of the national school system. Their attitude to the language and their experience of it in school would have been quite negative. The better off emigrant, such as William Bulfin, attended private academies.

Prior to the national schools, many children received their limited education in hedge schools. They were taught by "school masters" who had a good knowledge of Latin and Greek but were often as poor as the children they taught. They tended to be motivated by a love of learning. They were more positive towards the Irish language, using it as a medium of instruction.<sup>44</sup>

This last one gives an idea of the mysterious way words appear, disappear and survive in different (disguised) forms:

Some expressions that were familiar in Ireland (and have now disappeared) appear to have been retained by the Irish in the River Plate area because of isolation in remote communities on the Pampas. I met an elderly man at a St Patrick's Day *asado* in the Hurling Club around 1971 or 1972. Holding up his glass of wine, he said to me, "St Patrick's pot on you." I had never heard the expression in Ireland. Nor did others. However, some years later, while doing some research on Irish folklore I discovered a corresponding expression in Irish – "*Pota Phádraig ort*" – that was used in parts of Ireland in the 1800s. "*Pota Phádraig*" was a shot of whiskey or *poitín*, tossed back in honor of the saint.<sup>45</sup>

In April 2011, while visiting the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, in Montana, I was surprised by an important collection of letters written in Irish, addressed to the Irish migrants settled in that piece of Ireland in the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I would never go through a similar experience in my own country. The reason is that most of the Irish migrants in Butte, poor and unskilled, belonged to areas where the Irish

44. Email message dated June 18, 2015.

45. Email message dated August 31, 2015.

language was still strong (Cork, Mayo, Donegal, Wexford) and, since migrant population was significant, it was functional to keep the language alive.

In Chapter I, together with other publications, I mentioned *Fianna*, the Irish-Porteño nationalist magazine released as from March 10, 1910 through July 1912, whose editor was Pádraic MacManus. Oliver Marshall says it “was vehemently anti-British, referring to the ‘Empire of the Devil’ and issuing warnings of British plans to seize the south of Patagonia.” (Marshall, 1996, p. 9). In such context, the coherent editor’s decision would have been to print the paper in the Irish language, but since there was not a significant audience able to read it in the Celtic language, *Fianna* became one more sample of the English-language press in Buenos Aires. “On this Patrick’s Day 1910, we make our first appearance as an occasional review devoted to Irish-Argentine interets (sic) (...)”<sup>46</sup>

Not for nothing, in January 1875, when *Then Southern Cross* was published for the first time and most of the Irish immigrants were still alive, there was not a single line devoted to the Irish language.

### 5. Irish-Porteño or Hiberno-Argentine variation

(...) I found, as I still find, that it can no longer be said that any standard exists, nor do I think it desirable to attempt to establish one. It is useful that descriptions of existing pronunciation should be recorded, but I no longer feel disposed to recommend any particular forms of pronunciation for use by English people or to condemn others. It must, in my view, be left to individual English-speaking people to decide whether they should speak in the manner that comes to them naturally or whether they should alter their speech in any way.

Daniel Jones, *The Pronunciation of English*(1958)

Variation is governed by the social arrangements within a group or clan, or by a geographical boundary like a river or

46. *Fianna*, Vol. I, March 17, 1910, N° 1.



a line of mountains. And within the borders and limits of a given set of variants of one language it is quite normal to find other people using totally unintelligible sets of sounds (foreign languages like Welsh) or halfway houses (one's own language spoken by foreigners).

Robert Burchfield, *The English Language*

#### a) Introduction

As I stated previously, the Argentine Republic was one of the few non-English-speaking countries chosen by the Irish who left Ireland as a consequence of different critical causes.

Although a Catholic country, a completely different culture did not prevent Irish migrants from trying fortune in the far away South American nation. The Church played an important role in promoting and encouraging people to consider Argentina as a land in which they would be able to fulfill their dreams.

Father Antony Fahy, in one of the letters I quoted, stresses language as a problem. And indeed it was for more than a generation of Irish immigrants and Irish-Argentines. In fact, their relationship with the Spanish (or Argentine) language reveals the development of their integration, adaptation and assimilation to the new land.

In this slow process, the Irish started preserving their unity by relying on the English language which was not their original one. It appears that the Irish language did not play a significant part in the establishment of the Irish in Argentina, or it did in a subliminal way: its obliqueness, sound, rhythm, syntax and even vocabulary are there undermining the English language and giving way to what is known as Irish-English.

Irish words used to appear intermixed within their Irish-English speech, and the settlers' English was the variant they had spoken in Westmeath, Wicklow, Wexford, Cork, Longford and Tipperary.

In the context of the Irish Diaspora studies, which in the Argentine case are constantly revised, the legend that all Irish-Porteños are *estancieros* or well-off has finally come to an end. In fact, most of them hardly improved, and integrated the

social segment secretly known as “the poor Irish”; the others, the “happy few” quickly got in to the high porteño circles, became part of them, polished their English and cared nothing whether they were considered Irish or British; for the sake of a high education they sent their children to Europe or to English boarding schools in Buenos Aires. Theirs is a different story. I am focusing on the massive Irish migrants incorporated to the productive segment who built up a certain social identity which is revealed by their relationship with language. It is known that speaking a certain language gives the sense of belonging to a group. In the use of that language we reveal a particular identity and we also contribute to constructing it. In this sense they co-constructed their new world and their identity. Language and culture are linked.

#### b) The Irish-Argentine Lingo

For the sake of illustrating different cultural directions, and linguistic constructions created by the Irish migrants and their descendants in Argentina, I offer an account of frequent voices and sample pronunciations I was able to identify in texts, documents, letters and oral speeches. It is a curious miscellany integrated by English words, Irish words, Hiberno-English words, Spanish words and neologisms. Not intended to be exhaustive, and always in expansion, the following list aims to give a report of the principal Irish-Porteño expressions or Irish argentinisms:

##### - Irish-Porteño Brogue

1. Cat: /kaet/; Irish-Porteño will pronounce /kiat/.
2. Devil: /'devl/; I-P: /'divl/.
3. Interfere: /,intə'fɪə(r)/; I-P: /,intə'fə(r)/.
4. What: /wat/; I-P: /juat/.
5. Why: /wai/; I-P: /juai/.
6. Yes: /jes/; I-P: /ia:/.

##### - Irish-Argentine Lexicon

1. Acushla: “dear”. Hiberno-English. Origin: Irish “*a chuisle*” (“pulse of my heart”).

2. Alannah: “my child”.
3. Arsehole (instead of “asshole”)
4. Buck: “young Indian” or “*negro*”.
5. Buck-toe: “a derogatory nickname given by the Irish for a *gaucho*. As the *gauchos* traditionally gripped the knotted end of the stirrup by the big and second toe, the toes often became deformed, curving inwards. ‘Parrot claws’ was another equally derogatory (and descriptive) nickname.” (Susan Wilkinson).
6. Bucko: “a young fellow”.
7. Camp: “countryside”. After the Spanish word “*campo*”.
8. Cheena (Bulfin): “young girl”. After the *criollo* expression “*china*”.
9. Convention: “boarding house”. After the Spanish word “*conventillo*”.
10. Department: instead of “flat” or “apartment”.
11. Divert: “have fun”. After the Spanish word “*divertir*”.
12. Eejit: “silly person”, “idiot”. (“You big eejit!”).
13. Finishela!: “Put an end to that!”. Finish + the imperative Spanish suffix “-ela”.
14. Forteen: “barracks”. After the Spanish word “*fuerte*”.
15. Garrahalya (from Irish word “*gearrchaile*”): “young girl”, “lassie”.
16. Gauchodom: “group of *gauchos*”.
17. Grip: “flu”, “influenza”. After the Spanish word “*gripe*”.
18. Gushing: referred to the “Spaniards” or, more precisely, to the “*gallegos*”. Probably after the English verb “gush”.
19. Irish-Porteño: The Irish and their descendants living in Buenos Aires or born in that capital.
20. Majordomo: “butler”. From the Spanish word “*mayordomo*”.
21. Mate / matty: “*criollo tea*”.
22. Milics: people belonging to the Army. After the Spanish derogatory neologism “*milicos*”.
23. Mop / Mopa: “fool”.
24. Mopazo: a superlative “mopa”.
25. Musha: “indeed”, “well”, “let it be”, “is that so?”
26. Nap: member of the Italian community. Probably an extension after “*napolitano*”
27. Omadhaun: “fool”, “idiot”, “simpleton”.

28. Oncha: “female fool”.
29. Ordain (the cows): instead of “milk the cow”. From the Spanish verb “*ordeñar*”.
30. Pinch (a gum): instead of “get a flat tire”.
31. Pupil: not as a synonym of “student” but meaning “boarder”. After the Spanish equivalent “*pupilo*”.
32. Russian: referred to Jews of any origin.
33. Scutry: derogative, referred to a wimp person. After “scutters”, informal word for “scurry” (meaning to move quickly or in haste, in this case because of diarrhea).
34. Señalled: “marked” or “branded”.
35. Sláinte(used as a toast): “Health!”.
36. Tick / tickazo(referred to people): “uneasy”, “heavy”. Tickazo: tick + -azo (Spanish augmentative suffix).

#### - Idioms

1. Interrogative form with a typical Argentine tip (vocative): “What, *che*?”
2. Spanish words interpolated within the Irish-English speech: “I’m afraid the food won’t *alcanzar* (won’t be enough)”; “That book is no good, throw it into the *basura* (bin)”; “I bought a ticket for the *asado* (barbecue)”; “(...) and if a mix were to take place before the lambs were *señalled* (stamped) there would be no telling what the consequence might be.” (Bulfin, p. 231).
3. I’m in that (“I’m working on that question [or whatever]”). After the porteño expression “*estoy en eso*”.
4. For the *momento* (“For the time being”).
5. “They wouldn’t hear tell of it” (They wouldn’t heed).
6. “The kettle calling the pot black!” was improved by the Irish-Porteños with a simple word: “The kettle calling the pot black arse!”
7. “Pass no remarks!” (“Don’t pay heed”).

#### - Irish-Porteño statements based on Spanish ones

1. *Give me with* Jane (during a telephone conversation, instead of “put me through to Jane”).
2. “Peter *got down* from the bus” instead of “got off”.
3. Use of the (rhetorical) question tag “*no?*” at the end of a

statement, expecting a positive answer. “How do you do? It’s a nice day, no?”

4. “We’re in that”, meaning that “We are working or considering a certain question” (In Spanish: “*Estamos en eso*”).

5. “*Then* I’ll tell you”, meaning “I’ll tell you later”.

- Transferred errors

- *Actually*, meaning “at present” (after the Spanish word “*actualmente*”).
- *Suggestion*: meaning insinuation (after the Spanish word “*sugerencia*”).

The practice of transporting words from a second language to the first one, known as “relexification”, was regular in the process I am describing, as we will see in the following chapters. Also, but in the reverse, the subtractive bilingualism by which the stronger language undermines the first one. These phenomena, together with the expressions of the Irish-Porteño lingo described, were creative strategies that show the will and necessity of finding the convenient words to name a new and different reality.



### CHAPTER III

#### The Integration Stage

“(...) Life in this country has many snares and pitfalls; and the native, my dears, is not to be trusted. My first and last word to you must ever be: Beware of the native!”

I interrupted next, hoping that some light would be thrown on this mysterious subject.

“But what’s the matter with the natives, Miss Brady? What do they do?”

“You will understand in time, my dear child. Meanwhile the less you have to do with *them*, the better. My house, it gratifies me to say, is occupied exclusively by our own people!”

Kathleen Nevin, *You’ll Never Go Back*

The Irish immigrants who came to the River Plate during the period we are studying went through diverse experiences and, accordingly, met different destinies. Some of them re-emigrated to the United States, others, also disillusioned, went back to Ireland, a few fulfilled their expectations and became wealthy landowners, and the rest, in a way prisoners of their fate, did their best either in the countryside or in the city.

The Irish Diaspora in Argentina meant an encounter of cultures. It was a rich experience but, in more than one way, traumatic as well, since the only common cultural expression that linked the Argentine and the Irish people was the Catholic religion.

Do the language and the literature of the Irish in Argentina and their descendants reveal a process of integration, adaptation and final assimilation in terms of membership in the host country? The affirmative answer is shown by the written and oral expressions of many of the protagonists of this story. Although obvious, it is important to remark that the three stages are not homogenous, that it is a general, prevailing force that marks a tendency and a situation in each one of the

periods. Even nowadays you can find people who would clearly fit into the integration or the adaptation stages. In her article “Politics, Community and Nationhood in Irish-Argentine Oral Narrative, 2010-2012”, Sarah O’Brien recorded oral interviews of the Irish-Porteños; two of them are representative of what I am saying:

Author: So do you think you’re at the end of the line? Do you think the Irish connection will be forgotten about?

Rita Harrington: After I’m gone? Well, probably, yes. Listen, and that’s something which I won’t be sorry about. Because for the benefit of my country and *their* country that they can build a good Argentina. A nice country to live in. A decent country to live in. And a prosperous country to live in.

A: And not be concerned with who their families are? To build more of an Argentinian identity?

R: Yes. Because I couldn’t do it. I tried. But I couldn’t do it. I hope that they can.<sup>47</sup>

And:

David Donoghue: I always wanted to go to Ireland. I feel very, very Irish. Very attracted to Ireland. I’ve been three times to Ireland, once, for work, in Drogheda and Wexford. I had been the year before, on a golf trip, with some friends (...). I am a very frustrated Argentine citizen because I don’t understand Argentina. I have a terrible time; I suffer from the pains of the country. I just don’t understand how people can be so irreverent, so corrupt (...). I don’t understand Argentine people! And I go there and I understand all of them. I feel more part of that culture than of this culture. I feel like I don’t belong to this culture. It is so corrupt and so *chanta*\*; I don’t know how to say that.<sup>48</sup>

Note that the narrations were recorded between 2010 and 2012.

47. O’Brien, S. (2014). Politics, Community and Nationhood in Irish-Argentine Oral Narrative. In *New Perspectives of the Irish Abroad. The Silent People?* (p. 79). Maryland: Lexington Books.

\* False, treacherous.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 83.



I went through similar experiences while collecting my interviews. People of the same age would be either integrated or assimilated, showing that different stages are not necessarily matched with a given historical period.

### *Letters*

At the time I am considering, far from technology, the written word was vital to the communicative life of people and, in relation to the immigrants, to convey the impact their new existential situation meant to them. Letters, diaries, poetry and fictional narrative left by these pioneers are, today, a rich source not only of information but also of reflections and considerations of the migrant's soul. Although not generous, researchers can find a *corpus* of papers (letters, diaries, literature) giving an account of the Irish migration process in the River Plate. Public (*The Diary of Roberto Murphy [1887-1934]*, Edward Robbins' memoir, published by Florencia Young in bilingual edition and translated by Patsy Doyle as *Edward Robbins, 1802 -1866. Historia de nuestro ancestro*, and John Brabazon's account of his adventures in the "porteño camp", known, in translation by Eduardo Coghlan, as *Andanzas de un irlandés en el campo porteño (1854-1864)*<sup>49</sup>, among others), and private writings that, in the context of a revised investigation of the Irish Diaspora, are being constantly exhumed.

In 2003, thanks to Silvina Moore de Rodríguez Lubary, I came across a collection of 27 letters written by Murphys and Moores in Argentina to John Pettit, in Australia, covering the period 1865-1875.<sup>50</sup>

Having had access to the mentioned public documents and to other private ones, this series appears to me as special and paradigmatic because it covers a central period of the life of the Irish in Argentina and of the Nation as well, because it stresses

49. See *Addendum* in Chapter IV.

50. In 2006, Edmundo Murray published *Becoming Irlandés. Private Narratives of the Irish Emigration to Argentina (1844-1912)*; released by L.O.L.A., the volume includes the complete 27 letters. In Spanish translation, the book had been previously published in 2004.

the importance of written words, and because, assuming that the letters are private and limited to the addressee, the correspondent feels completely free, revealing immigrant's hopes without control, something we will hardly find in a text intended for publication.

In order to organize and stress aspects and ideas that are relevant to this investigation, fragments are not chronologically presented.

In all cases, emphases are added.

In spite of punctuation mistakes, very long sentences (forecasting the stream of consciousness technique!) and certain difficulties with verbal tenses, generally the prose is correct; very few Spanish words invade the speech ("*porteño*", "camp", "*puesto*", "*quinta*", "*estancias*", "*gauchos*"), conveying a determination to adapt (at least, at the beginning) to the working vernacular world. In another sense, nothing is said of going back Home and there is a clear intention of understanding the natives and historical facts. But we perceive a distance between the Irish and the natives. The community is still closed, watching at what is going on, not always in a positive attitude.

Written expressions appear to be vital to their existence, the openings and the endings of the letters show certain anxiety for a reply, for more letters with plenty of news; also notable is the way they swap newspapers. Written words, then, together with religion, acted as a balm in the lonely lives of these migrants.

The main historical context is the War of the Triple Alliance (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay against Paraguay), fought from 1864 to 1870.

*Letter 4: dated Buenos Aires, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1865, written by Sally Moore.*

(...) Mama and all our family are well thank God. I am happy to say that the boys have not been molested to serve as yet. There is no sign of the war terminating soon, people think that it will last for a long time yet. War is the greatest drawback to *our country*.

(...) I am sorry to hear that the drought is so bad in Australia, it is a general complaint here almost every summer, this year is

not quite so bad as other as there is grass (...).

*Letter 5: dated Buenos Ayres, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1866, written by Sally Moore.*

(...) I think dear John that if ever you come to Bs As you will find most of your cousins in convents. Fanny wrote since she went home, that Uncle James says that he'll not allow her or Kate his youngest daughter to town any more for fear they should go like the others. She says that all the young men are laughing at them and calling them prisoners but I don't think their imprisonment will last long, poor Uncle James will soon forget his fears and let them in.

(...) I'll not say anything about the war as the papers will tell you all about it. *I am glad to say that they have not molested any of our boys so far but they may do so at any time so that we are always uneasy about them (...).*

*Letter 6: dated South America, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1866, written by Fanny M. Murphy.*

(...) The war here is still going on so it makes the country very dull, our brothers were not troubled by this war as yet and I hope they may not, it is useless in my telling you as you see all about it in the *Standard* so I will refer you to it (...).

*Letter 7: dated Buenos Aires, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1866, written by Sally Moore.*

(...) I have sent same regularly every mail, as to the termination of the war which you thought the victory of Yatay would have been likely to bring, it seems as distant as ever, it is difficult to say when we shall have peace and the troops are suffering very much for want of food and other necessaries. *Our boys thank God are yet unmolested about the services but if the war continues they will be in want of more men so they are not by any means out of danger (...)*

Bs As is very dull at present, business is very bad owing to the war and failures very common even to the sheep farmers complaining to the scarcity of money. They are prices given for wool are low whilst the rent of land and other expenses attendant on sheep farming are very high so that our camp friends are not in the best of spirits. The time for making fortunes at that business is past. (...).

Sally Moore refers to “our country”, an expression which will be replaced for “the country” in other letters. The Irish appear to be generous with the Church but not with the national government: there is no sign of patriotism in relation to the war. Fanny Murph who, by the way, dates her letter with the general “South America” location, has a similar attitude.

Coherently with this position are the words related to the natives and the country. Fanny Murphy defines her task of describing the country people as “impossible”, but she tries, and her description is hard. It is clear that the idea of “integration” is not even an aspiration. Different is the attitude with other European communities, as we read in Sally Moore’s piece, where she refers to the young men from Europe who “get lost here”. The fault, this time, is not put on the natives but on the “*ingleses borachos*” (sic), together with the “*gauchos*”, the first few attempts to introduce vernacular words.

*Letter 13: dated Feb. 20th, 1867, Partido Las Heras, written by Fanny M. Murphy.*

Dear John, I don’t know if I ever gave you a description of our country people, and now I don’t know how to give it for it is almost *impossible*. The most of them are very ugly, dark and their hair is black, also their eyes, they are *like savages*, in the line of education very few of them know how to read or write and those that do are look up to with respect, this is the very lowest of them, their chief weapon is the knife, they wear a long one behind their back which is taken out for the slightest dispute, they are very good to strangers, they are very poor the women sew mostly for their living. The higher class are those who live in villages for those villages of the camp very few English live in them (...).

*Letter 14: dated Buenos Ayres, March 25, 1867, written by Sally Moore.*

(...) The provinces are IN A BAD STATE AT PRESENT. Mr. Klappenbach whose name you may have seen in the Standard in connection with the silver mines of San Juan is son to a partner of Mr. Bookey’s who was in your father’s time, he made a fortune in the leather business and went to France afterwards

returning, his son married Margaret Mr. Bookey's second daughter and is now proprietor of the mines or part proprietor I don't know which, they have been besieged for three days by robbers but defended the mines with only a few reliable men against a very numerous band. Although Bs As is often troubled with revolutions it is nothing to the other provinces where bands of robbers go about I may say at pleasure (...).

*Letter 15: dated Bs. As., June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1867, written by Sally Moore.*

(...) all our hope in times of sickness is in the *pompero* winds, all plagues disappear when the wind comes from the South. This unfortunate war is the cause of all our misfortunes and no one knows when it will end, perhaps when they have no more men to fight they may come to some arrangement (...).

Our friends and relations in *this country* are all well (...).

*Letter 16: dated Bs. As. November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1867, written by Sally Moore.*

(...) I send you a handbook. I hope it may prove interesting to you, it will give you a good deal of information respecting *this country* but as it was written when times were much better, what is said does not hold good now, and many young men left Ireland and came out here who would have done much better at home all through this handbook. *I don't know the reason but it is a fact that a great number of young men coming from Europe get lost here, they turn to drink and it is not from the natives they learn it*, for it is scarcely ever seen in the respectable classes, amongst the poor "gauchos", yes, but "*Ingles boracho*" which means drunken Englishmen is a common saying here (...).

*Letter 21: dated Buenos Ayres, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1869, written by Patrick Moore.*

(...) You will see by the papers some very clever articles about this country, it is coming down fast, sheep are worth nothing, wool ditto, and the only hope is in agriculture, people are very much afraid of going into this business, as last year the wheat failed owing to the heavy rains, and workmen are so scarce that it requires some capital to start the business at all.

(...) So you see Buenos Ayres is considered in rather critical circumstances, *it is no longer what it used to be, the country where fortunes were made by sheep in a few years.* (...).

Don't forget to answer this letter and give us a description

of how you pass your time in Australia, about the business and commerce with you and if sheep are as depreciated as here.

The simple mention of the English gives place to statements related to that community and to religion as well. Sally Moore admits that the Irish “mix very little with the people of *the* country.” In letter 19, Kate Murphy rounds off similar ideas, misspells the names of important provinces and, one more time, gives an adjective of negative connotation to define a country that is not worth while visiting. Religion seems to comfort her, as we see in letter 22.

*Letter 22: dated Bs. As., Jan 1865, written by Sally Moore.*

(...) Your papers I receive regularly, they are very interesting. I think that country is far in advance of this but I would not admit this to an Englishman, they are always finding fault with this country and the people, *and although we mix very little with the people of the country I like them better than I do the English perhaps it is because they are Catholics that we have more sympathy with them* (...).

*Letter 19: dated Buenos Aires, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1868, written by Kate A. Murphy*

(...) As Sally and Fanny have written to you lately I expect they have told you of all the deaths in our families this year, so I will not repeat them over again, you have no idea dear John what fearful ravages the cholera has made in Buenos Aires this year as in the provinces of Rosario, *Cordova, Mendoza*, 1868 will be memorable for ages, as well for cholera as for so many other plagues, locusts, frightful dust storms that during the better part of the day it would continue as dark as the darkest night consequently proceeded by scarcity of grass and water in the country parts, which caused the animals to die, in fact no one except those that witnessed it, could form any idea of the numerous visitations of Providence upon this *unfortunate Republic* this year, and now again people say the cholera is making its appearance here in B. Aires, one would think that now in winter it would disappear completely, but the doctors seem to say it will come again, all we must do is make up our minds for the worst, don't you think dear cousin we must be awful sinners when the Almighty punishes us so (...).

(...) I now send you this little branch of cypress I know you will treasure it as having grown over your mother's grave, I fancy how you must wish to see it I hope the day will soon arrive that we may see each other *but I fear you will be disappointed in this country, perhaps you have formed a grand idea of it and it is all the contrary, now I will conclude begging of you to write me soon...*

*Letter 22: dated Buenos Ayres, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1869, written by Kate A. Murphy*

(...) I cannot do more than offer my poor prayers for the repose of his soul, do not dearest cousin fret too much, you know all the goods of this miserable world are transient. I am most anxious to hear from you, write soon tell me all how you pass your time and how your many friends, treat me as a fond sister is all I ask.

There is a significant fragment in a letter by Murphy in which she refers to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the author of *Facundo*, a biographical essay and a decisive book concerning Argentine people and identity. Published in 1845, Sarmiento introduces the classic antinomy civilization/barbarism, a fact that still today, in different forms, pervades Argentine society. It is easy to understand Kate Murphy's (controlled) enthusiasm for the man and his ideas. Note that now she refers to "our new President."

*Letter 20: dated Buenos Aires, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1868, written by Kate Agnes Murphy.*

I expect you will see in the *Standard* the account of *our new President Sarmiento*, there was great welcoming him to Buenos Aires the day he landed, *he has been travelling in Europe and in the States, I believe, he has come out full of English notions*, and you know that won't do to expect to make such reformatations all in a day.

The last letter is dated September 1875, some months after the foundation of *The Southern Cross*. Since newspapers occupied great part of these people's time, it appears strange that there is no reference to Canon Patrick Dillon's paper,

which would become part of the Irish-Argentine lives.

If after examining other documents of the period, we accept that these letters are paradigmatic of a significant segment of the Irish migrants in Argentina during the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then the situation of the Irish migrants was on the first stage of the process, the slowest one: the isolated experience in which language, religion and culture were determinant.

At the end of this chapter we'll go through *You'll Never Go Back*, the novel by Kathleen Nevin. In a way, many of these pioneers were victims of the damnation implied in the title of the book. We will see that certain characters of the story could have subscribed any of the letters we just went through.

### **The role of *The Southern Cross***

Together with the Irish chaplains and the Irish-Porteño educational netting, *The Southern Cross* played a central role in terms of communication, and in the sharpening of a new identity. Since it was always reflecting the ups and downs of the Irish-Porteño community's liaison with the host country, it also worked as a kind of a linguistic and cultural thermometer.

Created to keep the community united and informed, newspapers and magazines were a channel for people's expression: letters, reports, interviews, comments and literary works. In 1861 Edward T. Mulhall (1832-1899) had founded *The Standard*, the first English paper in South America. An Irishman, Mulhall's newspaper was not devoted specifically to the Irish community; according to *The Hiberno-Argentine Review* it was "a splendid English commercial newspaper" (April 5, 1907). *The Hiberno-Argentine*, then *The Irish Argentine* and the nationalist *Fianna* magazine, with others, kept the Irish-Argentines informed and communicated, but they were all ephemeral.

*The Southern Cross* was the "genuine" paper of the Irish-Argentines. Conservative and controlled by the Catholic Church, it was published totally in English till the 1950s when it started publishing letters and short articles in Spanish, a very special Spanish invaded by English and Irish English



expressions. By means of language, the paper conveys the Irish-Argentine's variations in their way to integration, adaptation and assimilation. Always supervised by the Irish chaplains and reduced their educational, religious and social activities to what their own institutions offered, it was not easy for them to firmly step on the Argentine land, adjusting and harmonizing their lives within what already had become the South American melting pot. Yet, now and again, *The Southern Cross* reproduced timid plans in that direction:

The language we speak is one of the chains, which binds us to the past, and a word expressed in our native language will often recall a bygone scene that might otherwise be buried in oblivion. *There is (however) no reason why we should not be true to parents, country and friends and at the same time acquire a knowledge of foreign language and customs.* (My emphasis.)

But Irish nationality should not be affected:

(...) The Italians teach their children Italian in the school, and they grow up Italians in heart and soul. The German children will shed tears when you speak to them of the Fatherland, which they never saw. The Welsh will learn no language but their own. But the Irish learn English; and we know the consequences. The knowledge of Spanish should not lessen our attachment to Irish nationality. In fact it is doubtful whether the preservation of the English language among us tends to inspire a love for Ireland. (*TSC*, 20 November 1882, p. 4)<sup>51</sup>.

The last line is noteworthy because it shows that there was a clear conscience in the sense that English was not their original language but the one imposed by the invaders; it also implies the knowledge that there is a subliminal connection between language and identity. For the first time in their story the Irish would have the chance of getting rid of the inflicted tongue by acquiring one offered by a friendly and generous country! In fact, that is what their descendants really did.

51. Both fragments are quoted by Kelly, H. (2009). *"Ingleses". The Irish Immigrant Experience in Argentina. 1840-1920*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, pp. 176-177.

As from the 1960s the newspaper became bilingual; gradually, Spanish undermined the English language and, in the 1970s, edited by Fr. Federico Richards you would hardly find news, articles, essays or stories in English. I asked Fr. Richards about this and his justification for the drastic change was that the new generations of Irish Argentines, to whom the paper was mainly addressed, had lost the tongue of their ancestors. To complete the statement, I would add that, at that time, the process of integration and adaptation of the Irish-Argentine community had, finally, culminated in assimilation. I'm referring to the *visible* Irish Argentine community, not the one that had already melted into the *national* community.

Entitled "The land we live in", the first editorial, dated January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1875, gives a mythical account of the beginning of the story of the Irish in Argentina, in a poetic tone that hardly conceals its traumatic origin: mountains appear as a barrier capable of dividing two worlds, the European that will gradually become an ideal land, and "the moment in which for the first time we found ourselves alone facing the wide world". In symbolic terms the statement sounds like a rebirth that takes place in an unknown territory quickly discovered as friendly and generous.

Curiously, the first critical word is referred to justice: "It is true that Justice moves at a slow pace," a proclamation that suggests the necessity of protecting the *camp*, the main area of action of the Irish migrants.

We read that "in no part of the world is the Irishman more respected and esteemed than in the Province of Buenos Aires; and in no part of the world, in the same space of time, have Irish settlers made such large fortunes." These first considerations are related to production and profit, and not a word is devoted to the many "losers", the unsuccessful Irish whose sacrifice apparently resulted in nothing but a change of misfortunes. What Canon Dillon seems to praise are the financial possibilities that the country can offer to a "sober man", who "commencing as *peón*, and learning how to become a thorough sheep farmer will, at the end of years, be worth 1,000 £ sterling."

While praising what the Irish, the English and the Scottish did to improve sheep farming, he urges his country fellows to join the pioneers because “there is room for all.” It is in this context that *The Southern Cross* appears to “carefully watch over the interests of the Irish in the River Plate”, not a very spiritual program coming from a Catholic priest. Luckily, the paper meant much more than that to the migrants and their descents, and not only the well-off.

Quoting the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Dillon defines: “We are first Catholics, then Irishmen”, and adds: “well wishers and admirers of the country of our option.” Religion became, then, the key to integration, the first step to join a human group apparently admired by the newcomers. The writer goes on: “We are liberal in politics. Conservative in religion, respectful of the opinions of others, and charitable to all.” This generous description was not enough to ease the strong limitation the Spanish language meant to the migrants. The influence and actions of the Irish chaplains also slowed down integration. In another sense, although the paper was intended for the Irish-Porteños living in “the towns and camps of Buenos Ayres”, there is, however, a friendly word for “our liberal Protestant fellow countrymen.” How many of the Irish migrants were Protestants is a question not easy to be answered because the question was always ignored; perhaps Canon Dillon had an idea which explains his greeting.

A rhetorical and general salute puts an end to the first editorial message of *The Southern Cross*, whose essentials would go through all kinds of changes during its long life: in spite of financial troubles, the paper still circulates among the reduced members of the *visible* Irish-Argentine community. “Long live the Irish, English and Scotch residents of the River Plate. Long live the North Americans too. Long live the noble, generous and free country of our adoption. Long live the Province of Buenos Aires, the land we live in.” Not for nothing, the natural inhabitants of the country are not mentioned, thus showing that, after about 25 years, the Irish were still trying to adapt to their new geographical situation; integration, however, seemed to them a hard task.

***You'll Never Go Back (1946), by Kathleen Nevin***

As I already stated, although it was published forty six years after *Tales of the Pampas*, *You'll Never Go Back* gives an account of a previous stage of the Irish immigration process to Argentina: the one related to integration. The title of the book itself entails the resonances of a kind of damnation which twists the original intention of the young characters: making money as soon as possible and going back to Ireland.

In August, 1928, Kathleen Smyth (born in Co. Longford, Ireland) passed away in Buenos Aires city. She had immigrated to Argentina, where she met Thomas Nevin (from Clonfert, Galway, Ireland) whom she married. They had three children: Brendan, María Winifreda (Winnie) and Catalina (Kathleen). The latter conceived the idea of writing a novel, giving an account of her mother's crossing from Europe to South America and her first experiences in Buenos Aires. Kathleen died before finishing her work and Winnie, who died in 1976, completed it.

Very little is known about the authors. But the fact was that, in 1946, publisher Bruce Humphries released the book called *You'll Never Go Back*, simultaneously with Ryerson Press, which distributed the book in Canada. It is significant that the book was written in English, authored under an English name, Kathleen (Catalina), solely, and published in Boston.

Curiously the book was launched in a city where the Irish had not been welcome. It took years to re-examine their contribution to American society and culture. In her essay "Historical and Fictional Stereotypes of the Irish", Margaret E. Connors writes:

Historical views of the Irish immigrants changed more slowly. In 1903, Frederick Bushee was still characterizing the Boston Irish as an inferior breed:

At the present time, therefore, they (the Irish) show perhaps the largest proportion of socially inferior individuals of any foreign nationality... They gravitate toward unskilled work...

Their complete conformity in religious matters indicates little creative power or independence of thought. Though it is true that in political life they have developed leaders, even here their real power lies in their solidarity, in the docility of the rank and file.<sup>52</sup>

It would be another generation before the historians seriously reconsidered the Irish; that re-examination would be stimulated in part by the genius of Eugene O'Neill and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and by the successes of the Irish in the arts and the professions.<sup>53</sup>

The situation of the Irish in Argentina was, from the very beginning, the opposite.

*You'll Never Go Back* is a conventional (Victorian) novel written for a conservative audience, where those elements of the "new world" that differ from home are deemed strange, humorous, dangerous and exotic. The point of view of the narrator is that of a female whose particular interest is focused on the little things of life. In this, her attitude is similar to that of Irish-American writers who, according to Bonnie Kime Scott "give careful attention to domestic scenes and conflicts, and show common character types, aspirations, and problems of Irish-Americans (...)." <sup>54</sup>

There are very few Irish and Spanish words in the narrative. Set in both the city and the countryside, it accurately conveys the English spoken by the Irish-Porteños, thus revealing their gradual process of integration (or partial segregation). The language slowly reveals the Irish-Argentine exploration and discovery of a new land as colonized by a diversity of people, cultures and traditions.

The work appears inscribed in a very particular historic,

52. Bushee, F. (1903). *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston*. New York: Macmillan, pp. 150-151.

53. Connors, M. (1979). Historical and Fictional Stereotypes of the Irish. In Casey, D., & Rhodes, R. (Eds.). *Irish American Fiction: essays in criticism* (p. 5). New York: AMS.

54. Scott, B. K. (1979). Women's Perspectives in Irish American Fiction from Betty Smith to Mary McCarthy. In *ibid.*, p. 93.

social and linguistic context of our history. The content exceeds the original narrative plan and becomes a revealing document which shows that the Argentine language was the main barrier for a fast integration of the Irish migrants with the country; it describes feelings, attitudes and aspirations of the small waves of immigrants that settled mainly in Buenos Aires and, partially, in the south of Santa Fe and Córdoba provinces.

None of the North American editions were reprinted. During the 1970s, *The Southern Cross* serialized the story, and in 1979 a new facsimile edition was printed in Ireland<sup>55</sup>. In 2000 Alejandro Clancy translated it into Spanish under the title *Nunca regresará*<sup>56</sup>, which was published by LOLA (Literature of Latin America), and it included an interesting preface by Virginia Carreño who reports that, through Carmen Valdés, sub editor of *Saber Vivir*<sup>57</sup> during the 1950s and 1960s, she learned that Kathleen Nevin had published some short stories in that magazine. According to Carreño, Valdés met Winnie Nevin, who was an English teacher, at the time she assisted her as a proof reader and copy editor; she used to offer short stories written by her sister Kathleen.

Virginia Carreño states:

55. Under the auspices of The Longford-Westmeath Argentine Society, the work was reprinted by Cardinal Press. On the back-cover we read: "This novel captures for posterity the emigrant experience of so many Irish during the nineteenth century who left poverty stricken Ireland to seek a new life on the lush, rich, fertile, Argentine pampas. It tells the story of the Irish community in Argentina through the eyes of a brave county Longford girl, from leaving her family, confident on an early return, through a life of many contrasts to contented old age in Argentina." Finally, the book is justly defined as a "sociological gem".

56. In the title page we learn that the translation had been possible thanks to the (financial) support of Ireland Literature Exchange; a curious statement since the aim of that office is the promotion of Irish literature. Is the novel by the Nevins Irish literature? Irish-Argentine literature? Argentine literature? It depends on what defines its membership. Language? Subjects? Ideas? Setting? William Henry Hudson can be found either in an Argentine Literature Handbook as in a British one. The same happens with Samuel Beckett. Is the author of *Waiting for Godot* an Irish or a French writer? At the time I am writing this, I wonder if the debate is worthwhile.

57. Addressed to the middle class, *Saber Vivir* was a popular Argentine magazine.

*Exhumados, por fin, algunos de esos relatos, escritos en perfecto castellano, su lectura nos ofrece el único retrato a través de dos personajes ficticios que contemplaban al mundo desde su gozoso descanso, tras una esforzada vida de trabajo como profesoras de idiomas (...). (Emphasis added.)*<sup>58</sup>

Carreño quotes fragments of the (probably) autobiographical narrative:

*Fuimos juntas a Olivos. Llovía. (...) Un jardinero salió por el senderito del jardín a recibirnos. Le faltaba una pipa entre los dientes para que pudiéramos acabar de trasladarnos con la imaginación a Inglaterra. Vimos la casa y comprendimos que era el lugar que el destino nos reservaba para que viviéramos nuestra tranquila vejez de profesoras jubiladas.*<sup>59</sup>

England and not Ireland is their ideal land.

Valdés rounds off the partial description of the character defining Winnie as a pure Victorian dame, the latter adjective also fits the novel.

Elsie Rivero Haedo (Virginia Carreño's real name) told me that the Nevin sisters' parents ran a general store in Capilla del Señor (Buenos Aires) and that, thanks to that, they were able to send their children to study in a European college.

Essentially, the story is about three young Irish girls who have crossed over the ocean to Argentina with the idea of finding jobs as teachers, making money, saving it and going back to Ireland. A Mary Brady, who had done exactly that, was the role model. They are in Argentina, then, they find *teaching* is not an insignificant matter. Their plan will pave the way for more than one joke on the English of the natives.

58. Finally exhumed, some of those tales, written in perfect Spanish, offered a unique portrait viewed through two fictional characters that observed the world from their joyful retirement, after a hard-working lifetime as language teachers.

59. We went together off to (the city of) Olivos. It was raining. (...) A gardener came to welcome us walking on the small little path of the garden. Had he had a pipe in his mouth, our imagination would have taken us to England. We saw the house which we understood was the place fate had reserved for us to spend our calm old age as retired teachers.

(...) just make some money as quickly as possible and go back and be independent. (p. 26)

Most of them never went back, and the narrator tells the initial story of a group of immigrants. The main difference between Nevin's writing and that of William Bulfin's concerns Nevin's attitude towards the "*criollos*": from the very beginning, her characters are surprised and even scandalized at the natives' behavior.

The adventure takes place at a time when Argentina, after Sarmiento and Alberdi's policies, was willing to receive European workers. The so-called *Generación del 80*, a prominent local ruling class, subscribed the European promotion as we saw in Chapter I. Compared with other migration processes, the Irish immigration in Argentina was a small scale movement.

*You'll Never Go Back* is a conventional novel, correct in the eyes of the Victorian canon from where it comes from, and to the conservative audience to which it is addressed. Written in the first person, the story is limited to the point of view of the narrator, but it is, consequently, intimate and deep. Anything different from that nineteenth-century European reality appears to be strange, ridiculous or dangerous. But at the same time, integration is a must since the characters need to, at least, survive till they go back Home.

Curiously, ten years before the book by the Nevins had been released, Kate O'Brien (1897-1974), the now re-discovered Irish writer, had published a novel entitled *Mary Lavelle* (1936) whose plot, in general terms, is similar to that of *You'll Never Go Back*. Considered at the time daring and transgressor, this novel was also based on facts, and had to be published abroad, but for a very different reason: censorship. Finally, not for nothing, comedy prevails in *You'll Never Go Back*, while the tone and ending of *Mary Lavelle* is grave and dramatic.

The narrators had the choice of writing the story in Spanish. Published in 1946, it is clear that the Irish-Argentine community would have been able to read it and understand it correctly. But the question is that, by revealing the personality of the characters, recalling voices of the remote original language, contrasting Irish-English and Spanish languages and, gradually,



conveying the interaction of these two expressions (which, in the end, will explain the deep –and positive– sense of the title), language plays a central role in the book.

The story begins with the Captain warning the girls about the dangerous natives they will meet in Buenos Aires.

Now and then he protected me, and warned me against some dreadful men in Buenos Aires whom he called “the natives”. He said they would be apt to fall in love with my fair hair and my Irish eyes, but I must on no account pay heed to them, because they were tough customers and low curs. (p. 12)

The fact is that, as a natural option, it took the Irish-Argentines nearly two generations to intermarry. Nevin’s report specifies that

(...) the native was a poor specimen, physically and morally, and that there was no hope for the country because it was not a British Colony. (p. 13)

These opinions will be confirmed when the protagonist stops at a boarding house run by an old Irish lady:

“(...) Life in this country has many snares and pitfalls; and the native, my dears, is not to be trusted. My first and last word to you must ever be: Beware of the native!”

I interrupted next, hoping that some light would be thrown on this mysterious subject.

“But what’s the matter with the natives, Miss Brady?” “What do they do?”

“You will understand in time, my dear child. Meanwhile the less you have to do with them, the better. My house, it gratifies me to say, is occupied exclusively by our own people!” (p. 22)

Referring to a native who apparently fooled an Irishman, we read:

She’s a *cheena* woman (...) with three children (God forgive him), one blacker than the other. (p. 135)

The Argentine word *china* (girl) is adapted for the sake of pronunciation, becoming “cheena”; the same happens with the local tea known as *mate* which appears as “matë” or “matty”. The possessive noun “my”, replaced in Irish-English for “me”, is also imported by the narrator. The racist remark referred to the *criollos* cannot be underestimated: unfortunately the expression “blacks”, with its obvious negative connotation, which pervades this fictional work, resembles the attitude of part of the real Irish-Porteño world of the time.

The expression “our people” is usual and stresses Sarmiento’s idea already explained about the conflict between Europeans and barbarians. Different comments on the yellow fever and the way natives behave are a contribution to a bizarre picture. This is a *leitmotif* in the book and no effort is made to understand them. In addition, the narrator marries a countryman and none of the rest has much to do with the “*criollos*”. In this, Nevin, again, differs from Bulfin who does not consider natives a problem nor Argentina a “queer country” (p. 27). But, just as Bulfin does, Nevin quotes the Irish Argentinian dialect in its anomalous voices:

(...) Glad enough yez ‘ill be to get married in the end, and to take anything yez can get. (p. 37)

(...) Let O’Mara go wid ye and settle him (...). (p. 176)

The phrase “The native is not to be trusted” little by little will be broken up. In fact, in the middle of the novel the narrator says:

“I was lighting the gas in the schoolroom one evening, when Clotilde, whose Spanish I was beginning to understand (...).” (p. 95, emphasis added.)

The writer, indeed, is beginning to understand Spanish and her new reality as well. Coming to terms with her new state implies the appropriation of a new language. There is a parallelism between our perception of a different reality and the way we name it.

Words not only convey our linguistic identity; when we

refer to facts, our selection of words reveals a personal vision and our philosophy of life. “*El conocimiento espontáneo, inconsciente, intuitivo que el hablante nativo tiene de su lengua es cualitativa y cuantitativamente diferente al que pueda llegar a tener de otras lenguas que aprenda más tarde*”, states Ángela Lucía Di Tullio, and she quotes Carlos Octavio Bunge and his conviction that “*el abandono de la lengua materna es el índice más notorio que (...) representa la adaptación al nuevo medio.*”<sup>60</sup>

This appears clear in this case in which there is a correlation between linguistic integration and existential integration. We see it as from the first chapters of the story, in which English, Spanish, Irish and even Latin languages coexist.

Examples:

Take the *basura* out of that and not be stinking up the whole place. (p. 24)

But I didn't know anything about *ponchos* at that time. (p. 36)

He said it was a *concurso*. (p. 105)

I was sent out with a *peon* (sic). (p. 65)

Even some of our typical question tags are incorporated:

It is a nice day, *no?* (p. 123)

Well, and what made you leave Ireland, *eh?* (p. 33)

Then, afterwards, when the action moves onto the countryside, other voices (accent, intonation, syntax, vocabulary, indirectness or, to make a long story short, the Irish brogue) will remind us of the Midlands, the geographical area from where most of the Irish migrants came.

The English spoken by the natives is mocked:

60. Di Tullio, Á. (2003). *Políticas lingüísticas e inmigración. El caso argentino*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba. (The spontaneous, unconscious and intuitive knowledge that a speaker has of his language is qualitative and quantitatively different from the one he could get from other languages he can learn later. (...) the abandonment of mother tongue is the most notorious sign (...) representing the adaptation to a new habitat.)

Mees Connolly, no? Me, I speak lil' English. Raúl, he will explain if necessary. (...) "Two childs... no, children. This boy and one girl. Many teachers. In four year, ten. Too much change. Very bad for the accent. (p. 78)

The narrators prove to have very good ear to get the English of the Irish and that of the "*criollos*."

Conveying cultural tensions, two significant chapters deal with the essential questions that concerned the immigrants.

In Chapter 4, set in the city, we find a cultural confrontation; together with the next one, they could have been entitled "*civilización y barbarie*". It is noteworthy that the action takes places during carnival, that pagan and popular celebration in which dances and masks play the central role. It was during the Roman Empire that carnival appeared connected with social disorder and licentiousness. *The Columbia Encyclopedia* reports that:

Because carnivals are deeply rooted in pagan superstitions and the folklore of Europe, the Roman Catholic Church was unable to stamp them out and finally accepted many of them as part of church activity. The immediate consequence of church influence may be seen in the medieval Feast of Fools, which included a mock Mass and a blasphemous impersonation of church officials. Eventually, however, the power of the church made itself felt, and the carnival was stripped of its most offending elements. The church succeeded in dominating the activities of the carnivals, and eventually they became directly related to the coming of Lent.<sup>61</sup>

Carnival, then, is linked to paganism and to a remote confrontation with the Catholic Church. It is in this sense that the reaction of the narrator should be understood.

One thing I remember clearly is our first experience of Carnival –Nancy's and mine. (p. 39)

61. Chernow, B., & Vallaski, G. (Eds.). (1993). *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (5<sup>th</sup> edition). Columbia: Columbia University Press, p. 460.

Though Carnival also belongs to their culture, the Irish female characters have a negative vision of the celebration. A Miss Josephine describes it as “nothing you two ever saw before,” a statement which is ratified by the narrator: “She was right. Never had we seen or imagined such thing.” (p. 39)

The chapter discovers and describes certain oppositions: Christianity /paganism; Mass /carnival; civilization /barbarism.

As we will see, certain symbols, rather than language itself, will contribute to stress the narrator’s view of this side of reality: water, dust, the Mass ceremony...

Paradoxically, in this context there is a Mass in Latin which plays the role of a bridge between two cultures. Set in the 1880s, at that time Mass was said in Latin, a language unknown to the main characters and to most of the Catholic flock. But here language is not an issue; it is not a problem because Catholicism, as their religion, is in the root of the character’s culture, being based not on rational facts but on faith.

We went on and heard Mass, in a church that seemed to be made of gold: altar, pillars, pulpit, all shining and heavy with it. There were not enough benches, and the fashionable ladies knelt on velvet cushions.<sup>62</sup> It was also strange that I was thankful for my old Manual that had been Mother’s. *It reminded me that the Mass, at any rate, was the same.* (p. 40, emphasis added.)

In spite of this, note that, as it has been seen in Chapter I, the Irish migrants in Argentina wanted their own chaplains; here, again, the question had to do with language (and culture), not with nationalities.

In the description of the carnival festival we find expressions dancing in antagonism: “Home” (Ireland), “convent”, “confusion”, “laugh”, “scream”, “demented”, “scarecrow”, “perfect stranger”, “madness”, “niggers”...

The mob is described as a “mad crowd” integrated by “natives”. In spite of this, the Irish speech is infiltrated by Spanish

62. It is clear that the narrator is referring to the Pilar church, placed in the posh area of the city, known as “Recoleta”.

words: “*gaseosas*”, “*latas*”, “*sala*”, “*pésame*”, “*mayordomo*”, “*corso*”, and so on. “Strange” is a frequent adjective when the country is defined, and “queer”, as well. That sensation of strangeness that pervades the whole book, was, within the Irish community, frequent at the time, and went on well into the 1950s.

(Referring to Nancy) She would talk to the biggest omadhaur in the parish for half an hour after Mass on Sunday while Pat and I waited to drive her home. Then she’d laugh at the fellow all the way back, repeating his talk for us: “And he said this, and I said that, and he said the other, and isn’t he a fool?” (p. 45)

The narrative continues with no critical statement.

Obscure and sinister adjectives are used to describe the natives:

(...) the dark young man was talking to her in Spanish, I heard some of the girls refer to him as ‘Eliza’s native.’(p. 46)

Needles to stress the negative implication of the statement. And, in the end:

Nancy tittered continually while we changed, remembering this and that; but now that all was quiet again, I could not help thinking that if Bess had been with us we, or at least I, would never have joined that mad crowd; *and it made me ashamed* that I should have acted differently because she was not there to see. (p. 43, emphasis added.)

(...) Boys and girls? ... Oh, no, no. That’s the sort of thing that shocks the natives. Then Nancy said, just out of devilment, that surely it would be quite proper if Mr. Brady went with some of us, and Miss Honoria considered the idea for a moment. (p. 44)

The narrator completes the description by saying:

I daresay I should have forgotten that walk if we had taken it at any other time, but Carnival was filling the streets with noise and strangeness, and I felt that two eyes were not enough to

take it in. The solemn look was gone from the town. Everyone was screaming, laughing, or making a noise with a whistle or a tin trumpet. (p. 44)

Dance, as a symbol of life, plays an important role in this chapter.

Dance is a celebration and dance is language, a language beyond words. The courtship dances of birds display this. It is beyond words for, when words fail, up surges the dance. This fever, which can take hold of all beings and drive them to the pitch of frenzy, can only by a manifestation of the Spirit of Life. Often explosive, its aim is to throw off every vestige of the dual nature of temporal things to rediscover at a bound the primeval Oneness. Then body and soul, creator and creation, visible and invisible meet and anneal timelessly in a unique ecstasy. The dance proclaims and celebrates its identification with imperishable.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps because the characters feel outplaced, the deep implication of this positive statement is not fulfilled in this novel.

I expected the dance to begin at once, but nothing of the kind happened. Eliza did her duty at the piano, while a tall, dark, young man turned her music, but not a soul took the floor. More fellows appeared, but they seemed embarrassed to find that no one was dancing and that they might be expected to open the ball. At any rate they retreated into corners and stuck there. (p. 46).

There is no room for the quoted "Oneness" because the attitude is not adaptation nor assimilation but, simply, integration. An incidental character pops into the room "holding a tall, white hat and a pair of kid gloves"; he explains that the town "is under the sway of Momus, the Lord of Misrule." (p. 47)

"It is my opinion that the natives become more boisterous

63. Chevalier, J., & Gheerbrant, A. (1996). *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Penguin Books, pp. 272-273.

and unrestrained with each succeeding year.”

“Ah, well, Carnival excites them, Mr. Considine. Now, my young people, on the other hand, are most unresponsive tonight. So discouraging! Could you suggest anything?” (p. 47)

Two adjectives, “boisterous” and “unrestrained”, are enough to derogatively describe the way the natives were regarded. A Mr. Kennedy, of the Bank of London, pops in, but his presence is of no help. Amid “rude fellows,” “simple harmless lads,” in an atmosphere with European aspirations (a polka is played), “(...) the quadrilles were stiff and everything was terrible solemn (...)”. (p. 47). Again, words and expressions such as: “a strange thing happened to me”, “frightened”, “strangers”, “mad town”, and “a language I did not know”, are central to describe an atmosphere and the narrator’s point of view.

In this atmosphere the narrator feels she is a victim of an awkward situation, she admits she is scared and rounded by “strangers” in the middle of a “mad” city. In reference to the metropolis, adjectives with a negative connotation seem insufficient.

At a dance, a young Irishman appears. John Barry is his name, “who behaved quite *unlike* the others.” (p. 50, emphasis added.)

He talked to me while I drank my tea. He was from Galway and had been in the country two years. I told him, a little gloomily, I suppose, that I had been out three weeks.

“The first months are the longest,” he said. (...)

There was, as I mentioned before, nothing remarkable in anything he said or did, yet the way it comforted me was wonderful. (p. 50, emphasis added.)

It is in this situation that the narrator defines her feelings; the word is “homesickness.”

There is a distant attitude towards the very few Spanish words we find in the novel. It seems that they are mentioned for the sake of creating a certain atmosphere and contrasting two different worlds. There are very common expressions such a *sala, gaseosa, cochero*, etc., and, in terms of the plot,



they are not central to the story. But they contribute to the tone of the narration which varies: melancholic, critical, ironic, scornful...

Chapter 5 is set in Mercedes (Buenos Aires), in the “camp.” The journey, by train, contrasts the big city with the pampa and its immensity. It is in this area that we learn about Mrs. Brophy, a character *assimilated* by the camp, its customs and traditions; but, in a way, still linked to the remaining of her mother language. Although she belongs to the South American scenario, Spanish is not her language. Mrs. Brophy, her speech, is an effective and original creation of the novelist, she appears as an archetypal personality within the Irish migrants in Argentina.

The passage from the city to the countryside is stressed by the description of the *pampa*’s immensity. The train invigilated by a “cruel sun” goes off to the “open country” through “rows of trees, and some houses” up to what the narrator feels as “*nothingness*”. Their experience in the camp is rather traumatic. Nancy finds a partial evasion by reading *Maid, Wife or Widow?* (1895), by the prolific Irish novelist Mrs. Alexander (pseudonym of Anne French Hector [Dublin 1825-London 1902]). The novel within the novel is functional to one of the main subjects of *You’ll Never Go Back*, also Victorian, since the story portrays women in extreme situations. Within the Irish migrants in Buenos Aires, the three Victorian situations mentioned in the title of Alexander’s book appeared to be limited options to women’s eyes that saw in the education field and the urban business and commercial activities real and valid possibilities of improvement. One more time, the possession of the (Irish) English language was the central means.

Dated July 31, 1913, and probably written by Patrick McManus (1864-1929), *Fianna* published an article on this topic, stating that:

(...) there is a wide demand at present in Buenos Aires for typists, shop girls and governesses that can command two languages, and it would be criminal to condemn young girls of our race to the most slavish and worst paid occupations, like

domestic service, who for a few dollars extra for their education could easily be fitted for high positions in life, with easier work, a brighter future and consequently more certainty of finding husbands and becoming mothers of educated and cultural families –families that would be a credit to our race when educated in its traditions; instead of such shoneen<sup>64</sup> families as we now often meet, ashamed of their race, their names and their parents; anxious to be confounded with the Calabreses or Cockneys, rather than point out their descent from the oldest white people in Europe—the Gaels.<sup>65</sup>

Little by little the narrator is invaded by the language of the new land. Words she chooses to refer to the countryside are, again, those of a negative connotation: “dust”, “dusty”, “darkness”, “dangerous natives”, “terrible scarce”, “mud”... And one more time her opinion that the country is “strange”, “big and empty.”

(...) but the farther we went the less there was, until in the end it seemed to me that there was nothing. (p. 53)

Mrs. Brophy has been part of that “nothingness” for many years, as she reports in her particular language which the novelist is able to convey in a very effective way. It is this talent that turns out the novel into a significant linguistic document.

Tedious is it, and your ladyship sitting at yer ease in a fine thrain? If it was thirty years ago, and you in a bullock cart, just after havin’ a child, an’ goin’ to a place where there wasn’t a house built for ya, nor well sunk to give ya wather, mebbe it ‘ud be tedious! That’s how it was when I came to the country. God help us, the kind of impedent slips that comes out from Home these times, wid their silks and their satins and their airs! (p. 54)

In the classic confrontation between civilization and barbarism, Mrs. Brophy, in concert with her degraded language,

64. Irish word, diminutive of Seon (John), referred to those who imitate English ways. Brit.

65. Quoted by Marshall, O. in *op. cit.*, p. 9.

is seen by the narrator as part of the latter. Her reaction at Nancy reading a book is consistent:

“I’ll thank ya,” she said, “not to be wastin’ yer time nor soilin’ yer mind wid thrash while y’are in my sight. When we get home, please God, I’ll find something better for ya to do.” (p. 54).

The description of the vast pampas and the idea of being “nowhere” together with the repetition of words such as “dark” and, mainly, “dust” (involving its symbolic meaning)<sup>66</sup> create an aura of death which resembles the characters’ feelings towards the country they are planning to leave.

But when we were standing in the midst of it, it grew and grew, above you and around you till you felt no size at all, and it seemed as if a great arm had swept across the world carrying away every upstanding thing, leaving an *emptiness* behind it, to be filled with wind and light.

(...)

The land was so flat, and so bare that the clumps of thistles growing by the road caught one’s eye at once, the tallest things in sight.

(...)

Trees were terrible scarce, I thought.

(...)

What a strange country. I thought it! So big and so empty. (p. 58, emphasis added.)

In this atmosphere there is a brief sequence in which we find a secondary character apparently assimilated:

The other surprise was the driver himself; I had made up my mind on account of his clothes, and not having heard how Mrs. Brophy addressed him, that he was one of the dangerous natives. I was disappointed when our hostess, after an hour’s journey, said: “The rain is keeping off, Tom,” and he answered: “It is, so.” (p. 56)

66. “(...) dust is sometimes a sign of death. The Children of Israel cast dust on their heads in token of mourning (Joshua 7: 6), while Psalm 22: 15 refers to ‘the dust of death.’” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, p. 321).

Another funny situation having to do with phonetics arises because of Mrs. Brophy's pronunciation:

Mrs. Brophy called this boy McGill, but he was not an Irishman; I learned next day that the name meant Michael. (p. 56)

This chapter is significant because both the language of words and the language of symbols are functional to the construction of an atmosphere which artistically reveals the deep feelings and intentions of the protagonists. It is also important because it introduces an anomalous character such as Mrs. Brophy who, without giving up her original language, adapted her life to a new situation, becoming a vulgar "campwoman" at a certain stage of the process of integration as it is revealed by her corrupted language and behavior. Mrs. Brophy is, also, the agent that gives the meaning to the title of the story:

In search of a subject to cheer us up, I said to Nancy, "Won't we have a lot to tell them, Nancy, when we go home?"

It was Mrs. Brophy who answered me.

"When ya what?" she asked, with such a sneer in her voice that I said quite sharply, "Well, we'll be going home *some* time!"

"Indeed, an' ye'll not. Ye can let that out of yer heads. Who'd want ye?"

I began to ask her what she meant, but she would not let me have my say.

"I know dang well ye'd not be out here if there was e'er a man anxious to keep y' at home," she said. "And I know dang well ye'll not go back to whatever ye kem away from. If ye have an ounce of sense between ye, ye'll do what I done □marry a good man (Lord have mercy on Jawn Brophy) that'll leve ye in a good way when he goes—that is, if y'ever get the chance." (p. 57)

When the story is over, the narrator will reflect: "I laugh now sometimes when I remember how innocently we two little flies walked into the spider's parlour."

At one stage of the chapter, it happens that Mrs. Brophy leaves the girls alone. Then, words are, again, replaced by an effective symbol: dance.

When the *dust* she raised was settling back on the road, Nancy and I fell into each other's arms screaming, and danced a sort of jig. (p. 62, emphasis added.)

Chapter 5 ends when the girls make the decision to leave:

(...) we should tell her respectfully (but firmly), that we were going back to town at once. Nothing, Nancy said, would induce her to spend another week in "the camp."

"Dust" (mentioned five times), "Moon" (symbol of death)<sup>67</sup>, "dark" (eight references) are words that are significantly repeated to round out the description of that kind of symbolical cemetery. It also conveys a nostalgic atmosphere, a sensation of emptiness which, apparently, could only be overcome by returning home.

As from chapter 14, there is a slowdown in action and narrative rhythm. Sentences are longer and the prose becomes rather baroque. Spanish words are stressed. The tone of certain dialogues changes, as well as the kind and (somehow) festive atmosphere, which is occasionally displaced by sarcasm. These mutations are deepened in chapter 18, where prose is much more discursive while puns and humor are dropped. It is probably in this zone of the story that Winnie assumed the voice of the narrator. It is most likely that María Winifreda Nevin completed the story from chapters 14 through 20, almost the third part of the book. It seems that it was Winnie's duty to give an account of the last part of the narration which, by the way, was that of most of the Irish immigrants and their descendants. But above all differences, something essential which still pervades the story as a whole is the slow but persistent linguistic game played by different cultures in their struggle to convey a reality which is diverse and unique at the same time.

In chapter 17 we get a hint of the possibilities (or

67. To humans the Moon became the symbol of this passage from life to death and from death to life and was even regarded by some peoples as the place where this transition took place, in parallel with a location below the ground. (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, p. 669).

impossibilities) of language. The narrator is moved by prayers said in the Latin language of her pious infancy. Despite their semantic emptiness, the old voices will take her back to a lost paradise where words appeared to be unnecessary.

When I heard the prayers said the way I was used to and not in Spanish or Spanish Latin, as I'd been hearing them of late, I covered my face with my hands and cried like a softy.

The storyteller is, now, somebody else. The condemnatory title of the book was not strong enough to prevent her from praising other people's constructions, and, what is more, the richness implied in the encounter of diverse cultures. Beyond any critical attitude, certain optimism runs through the novel.

We are what our words reveal. We are our own speech. The slow progression that goes from strangeness and scorn to curiosity and integration implies, as it is shown in the novel, a linguistic correlate.

Representing a fascinating correlation between social reality and linguistics, *You'll Never Go Back* is an exceptional and important literary and sociological record.

(In 1932 Barbara Peart had already given an account of a similar experience, but under the form of personal "memories", entitled *Tía Barbarita*. Married, and in a different position [she was travelling to South America with her husband to run a ranch near Gualaguaychú, in the province of Entre Ríos], we find an analogous, amazed and Victorian vision of the Argentine reality. Little by little the place becomes a kind of bubble in the middle of the camp. Though it is not possible to establish whether the Nevin sisters read the book, in terms of style and tone there is a subtle connection. Also in the interpolation of Spanish words, more than once mistakenly written. In *Tía Barbarita* we read that "Bertran and Cyril Bernard were rapidly going native, more *gaucho* than the *gauchos*. They assumed the costume, with big knives and bolos in their belts, and Barbarita's stern refusal to allow them to appear at the dinner table in this outlandish 'get-up' created bad blood between them." Finally, the narrator reveals that "Horse-riding she had bargained for

when she married and came out to the Argentine, but not for love.”)

European migration to Argentina and failure are part of significant chapter in Argentine literature. Armando and Enrique Santos Discépolo, among other playwrights, gave a strong and dramatic account of the Italian immigrants at the beginning of the last century as we can see in *Mateo* (1923), *Stéfano* (1928) by Armando Discépolo and in *El organito* (1925) written with his brother Enrique Santos, also a tango composer. The tone is pessimistic and situations, grotesque. Kathleen Nevin, in *You'll Never Go Back*, disguises failure with controlled nostalgia and humor. Her characters are able to integrate their lives to a far-off country, to a different culture, with a sense of resignation or fatalism. The English language keeps them linked to their roots. In spite of the last lines, the novel cannot conceal a sense of unhappiness.

This integration period was very slow. The death of Father Fahy, who limited his people, and the Dresden affair which meant the ending of the Irish migration to the River Plate, opened the door to a richer phase, that of adaptation, as we will see in the next chapter.





## CHAPTER IV

### The Adaptation Stage

(...) Spanish phrases and idioms have inflected the English which they habitually use; but the brogue of Leinster and Munster has remained intact. Spanish and Creole customs have, in a greater or less degree, insensibly woven themselves into their life; but they are unwilling to admit this, and their struggle to preserve the traditions of the motherland is constant and earnest.

William Bulfin, *Tales of the Pampas*

Be Argentine by all means but at present remember you are only so by birth, your blood and color will for another few generations be Irish and white and while that blood remains don't disgrace it not let your children do so. God put that Irish blood in your veins and you have no right to ignore it, so don't be ashamed of and never ought anyone so blessed wish to change. The question is which is the better of the two, Irish or Argentine? Let us rise them up and form a good Irish Argentine, which has done and ever will do more for this country than the Argentine alone.

From a letter written by Lawrence Gahan  
to William Bulfin, dated December 2, 1900.

#### 1. Introduction

Cultural tensions are unavoidable within a foreign community immersed in a foreign country with different traditions and language. These tensions were controlled while Father Anthony Fahy was the patriarch of the Irish in Argentina. As mentioned in the first chapter, he was a leader who organized the lives of the Irish colonies in all senses: financial, educational and even in a private sense he was known as an effective matchmaker. It is clear that with his actions Father Fahy, perhaps unwillingly, promoted the segregation of the Irish community. Another

factor that contributed to this was the wave of immigrants still coming to Buenos Aires.

From this perspective, the death of Father Fahy in 1871 and the SS City of Dresden affair in 1889, described in Chapter I, marked the beginning of a unhurried adaptation of the Irish into the host society, an experience that offered new directions to a community that had been well received, although closed even in its indispensable determination of adapting to their new world.

The first words incorporated to the immigrant's vocabulary were those linked to their working life: "camp" (probably the first adaptation), "*estancia*", "*poncho*", "*mate*", "*potrero*", "*pampa*", etc.; the last, the ones related to the private life: names, religion, culture, even food. It was a movement in which group affiliation and identity directed the linguistic choices of the speakers. (It is known that speakers can change and even disguise their speech for the sake of deserting a group and moving to another one they would like to be part of.)

Books, newspapers, letters and private documents show in what way the Irish integrated Spanish words and started getting involved with national affairs.

Published in Buenos Aires and edited by Conor Mac Nessa, a book called *Songs of the Gael in Tongue of the Gall*, inscribed to the Irish chaplain Fr. Edmund O'Flannery, was released in 1918. In the dedication we read:

This collection of old and new ballads *in the tongue of the enemy* was prepared for the Irish Pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Lujan (sic), organized by the Irish Catholic Association for St. Patrick's Day, 1918, to beseech (at the Pope's request) "a just and universal peace" which would free the Irish Republic from foreign control, *restore the Malvinas to their rightful owner, Argentina (...)*.

To us, Irish, you, Father O'Flannery, represent that unquenchable spirit of our race, that undying faith of our land: for this reason we dedicate you the only volume of verse voicing these feelings, published in *this our free home of Argentina, to which you have taught us and our children to tribute the same loyalty our fathers did to the cradle-land that England has so*

frequently drenched in blood.

On these free *pampas*, you Father O'Flannery, have been an undimmed and undiminished light to us, and in this *free land* your memory will remain historic long after you are gone, together with that of your friend and predecessor, Father Antonio Fahy, whose duties you shared, whose labor you continued; and the historic significance of your work, cannot be diminished by envy, ignorance or hostility, among a people who know and appreciate you as the Irish people in Argentina, and your sincere well-wisher in this year of your golden anniversary in the priesthood. (Emphases added).

THE EDITOR

Arrecifes 29<sup>th</sup>, September 1918

At that time, within the Irish community, priesthood was (and still is) the highest social condition and we can see it in the tone of the whole text. What we can also see is an aggressive discourse against the British. With obvious exceptions like the writings of Bulfin in *The Southern Cross* against *The Standard*, the brief existence of *Fianna*, and certain texts by McManus, this was not common in the story we are examining. The coexistence of both communities in Argentina had been always peaceful. And though the reference to the Malvinas sounds more a hint against the British than supporting our country, there it is. Argentina is praised as a “free home”, because liberty is a central value for the Irish, and the writer also admits having been taught “to tribute the *same loyalty* our fathers did to the cradle-land.” We are clearly in the adaptation stage where both countries mean the same to the Irish-Argentines.

## 2. What was going on with the Spanish language in Buenos Aires?

There was one more problem related to the Irish migrants and their connection with the Spanish language. It concerned not only the Irish but immigrants to Argentina from all over the world, as well. Though it was true that, as from Sarmiento, Alberdi and the so-called *Generación del 80*, a promotion existed for European people to become part of the Argentine project, the patriarchy, or what today we would call “the

establishment”, the elite, saw the immigrants as agents of language corruption. They were right, and the local theatre (the *sainete*), the tango and that record of criminal words known as *lunfardo* expressed it; not to speak of people in the street, the working class in their daily life. The topic had been in debate since the late 1880s and early 1900s. The problem is what “corruption” means in the context of a system always on the move as language is. Thanks to the linguistic “corruption” suffered by Latin, the Italian, French and Spanish languages were formed and expanded. The Irish migrants who were trying to integrate themselves to the country, did it, also, by borrowing the words they heard, a vocabulary rich in transportations and neologisms. Roberto Arlt (1900-1942), the proletarian urban writer, in his article “*El idioma de los argentinos*” (1933), a text that any Irish-Porteño would have subscribed, supports the natural and “arrogant” popular language in opposition to academic directives. Years before, in 1928, in an article presented with exactly the same title, after analyzing and mocking the situation of the Spanish language in Buenos Aires, Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) had concluded that each one’s duty is to find a personal voice.<sup>68</sup>

These and other discussions did not prevent the foreseeable fact: vivid, the River Plate language, nourished by all kinds of components, built up a singular and expressive linguistic system which is not precisely Spanish but, as the two mentioned writers coincided in calling it “*el idioma de los argentinos*” (“the language of the Argentines”), a fulfillment where the Irish-Porteños, silent contributors as well, found the tools for their social adaptation.

### 3. *The process of adaptation as revealed by the written word*

A critical letter, written in English, signed by A. McHana, and published by *The Hiberno Argentine Review* on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1906 (six years after Bulfin’s *Tales of the Pampas*) reaffirms the attitude of a certain segment of the Irish-Argentine community

68. Borges, J.L. *El idioma de los argentinos* (1994). Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, p. 149.

towards their new reality, their adopted country and the Spanish language which, little by little was becoming their first one :

Among the Irish-Argentine community many parents there are, who get a school master to teach their children, or will send them to a school where they will receive all instructions in the English language, and probably learn the history and geography of Ireland; but they will not receive one single lesson in the National language, much less be instructed in the slightest degree in the history or geography of the land of their birth.

This is a great mistake, a mistake which the child will regret in after years, and even may be the cause of its failure. For a proper education in the language and history of one's country will always be a help to satisfy our necessities, and very often is the cause of success in life. (...)

It is not my intention in the foregoing to approve or disapprove of the actions of parents or of those who manage the institutions, but it is simply my desire to reiterate the opinions already sincerely expressed *that the children are Argentines*, and should therefore be educated principally in the language, etc. of their country, and instill into their minds a holy love for the land of their birth, *and secondly for that of their fathers and forefathers*, for if they don't first learn to love their own country, much less they will they love that of their parents, and therefore they will not be in heart either Argentine or Irish. (Emphasis added.)

The fact that this letter was published by *The Hiberno-Argentine Review*, a paper that later on would significantly change its name to *The Argentine Review*, implies certain adherence on behalf of the editors.

Note that, without rejecting his cultural heritage, he displaces it, admitting the adopted one as his own. Had this letter been written in Spanish, the arguments stated by McHana would have been more persuasive. But, was he able to do it? Would the subscribers understand his complaints? Would it have been published?

A year after, *The Hiberno-Argentine Review* promoted a literary competition, subject to the following conditions:

1. Competitors must write in English or Irish and be born in Argentina.
2. Competitors must select from among the following subjects:
  - a) Past, Present and Future of the Irish Argentine Community;
  - b) Father Fahy and his work;
  - c) Admiral Brown;
  - d) Woman Suffrage;
  - e) The coming Pilgrimage to Luján.

The first item reveals that at that time there must have been a more or less audience competent in Irish language. But English was the commercial language and since the business relationship of England with the National state was increasing, it was highly convenient to strengthen it; it is also true that young Irish girls were offered positions to teach English but never Irish. One more component against the development of the Irish language was that the Irish migrants were all the time surrounded by Spanish speakers. In the new context, Irish-Gaelic which was already dying in Ireland, was not significant to the establishment of the Irish in Argentina. Thus, the bilingual situation of the Irish went through the following development: English / Irish; English / Spanish; Spanish / English, and, eventually, Spanish. Every newspaper addressed the Irish-Porteño audience (even the nationalist *Fianna* was written in English.) The other two rules of the competition stress the personalities of the two Irish-Argentine heroes: Father Fahy and Admiral William Brown. The woman suffrage topic is not surprising considering the matriarchal component of Irish society.

*The Hiberno-Argentine Review* included ads in Spanish, literature written by Irish writers and Irish-Argentine contributions. So did *Fianna*, with the essential difference that it also accepted contributions written in the Spanish language; this is significant considering that the paper circulated between 1910 and 1912. In this sense it was ahead of *The Southern Cross*. The latter was very generous in accepting original works. Consequently many “literary pieces” were more contributions

to socio-linguistics than to art. The collection, which is full of examples, gets to its highest peak with William Bulfin's short stories, as we will see; Bulfin, by the way, was the editor of the paper during the period 1896-1906. Just to give an example, let us read fragments of a letter to the editor, dated Santa Fe, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1921, referred to that non linguistic language so linked to the migration process in the River Plate, which is tango:

(...)

I said I considered modern dances quite permissible, graceful and elegant; so you can imagine the rude awaking I got, when I read a letter in your last issue, under the heading "About Modern ballroom dancers" and signed A. M. M.

(...)

Referring to the "tango" there are several ways of dancing it. The modern tango, when danced without *cortex* or exaggeration by decent ladies and gentlemen in respectable Irish Argentine circles is far different from what was danced by the half-naked savages years ago. (...)

A. M. M. tells us where the "tango" originated, and the course it followed, down to the present day; but he does not say a word about the changes it underwent since its origin. He gives the shocking impresion (sic) that it is danced today in all saloons, exactly as it was danced by the Indians long ago. (...)

The author of this letter must have been considered open-minded at the conservative time he/she wrote it. The reference to the "respectable Irish Argentine circles" and the comments in the last paragraph prove that he/she feels part of the Irish Argentine society at the time he/she sticks to the European antinomy proclaimed by Sarmiento.

But it is in the private letters that we find how, completely free, in his/her conscious or unconscious determination to become Argentines, the writer borrows Spanish words, writes them in the best way and, if necessary, creates neologisms. The samples taken from my private archive will give an idea of what was going on with the Irish-English language, which means with the Irish-Argentine community.

Rosie Dunne (from Teodelina, Santa Fe) addressing her sister Katie (in Buenos Aires).(My emphases).

We four *passed a nice time* although we missed our dear little pet he left our home *very triste*. I cannot forget all the nice *recuerdos* he left me and Pocholo. (...)

*Bueno, che, hasta prontito*, love to all our dear ones and you both receive a big kiss from your fond sister. Rosie. (January 23<sup>th</sup>, 1964).

*Bueno*, Katie make up your mind and come now, you have time until the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Oct but you write to me and let us know when you can come because Pocholo has to arrange things in Arenales before he touches his fathers (sic) grave he has to take out *permiso para el traslado* so you write a week before so he will have everything ready in time. I hope the *childrens* mother is better. *Bueno* I think this will be my last letter until we meet don't forget to write to me as soon as you get this and let me know what you intend to do you need *a lo menos* 3 or 4 days. (...). (Saturday, October 9<sup>th</sup>).

(...) Now Katie *when ever* you like and able to come just let us know but not *untell* January as all the people are working at the *cosecha de trigo*. Katie if you and James are able to come just drop me a line letting me know *mas ó menos* the time you can come (...) but write *enseguida* so I will get your letter before I leave here, this time there is no hurry but you come and *aprovechar* the nice sun and the lovely weather. (...). (December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1965).

Letters of this kind are frequently near the *Ramón Writes* series (those funny and, more than once, exaggerated chronicles supposedly written by an awkward Argentine student of English.) Created by Basil Thompson, Ramón and his letters used to appear in a weekly column published, on Fridays, by the *Buenos Aires Herald* between 1949 and 1977. It is known that the author based his character's written expression on the Irish-Porteño speech:

Ramón was born –or, more properly, conceived– in Tortoni's



café on Avenida de Mayo on the afternoon of October 20, 1949. (...)

The *Herald* offices in those days were at Rivadavia 767, and the venerable Café Tortoni, fifty yards away in the 800 block opposite the old *The Standard* building, was a handy place for an afternoon cup of tea. By chance I had a relative by marriage working next door in Wright's, and we fell into the habit of having tea together, taking it in turns to pay the bill.

One day doubt arose as to whose turn it was to pay, "I think," said my companion in a deliberate paraphrase, "that it touches to me." We both chuckled at what in those days was referred to as Irish-Porteño, and before leaving, spent an amusing ten minutes thinking up other Irish-Argentinisms.<sup>69</sup>

In his *Tales of the Pampas*, William Bulfin conveys the curious miscellaneous language the Irish spoke in their relationship with the native gauchos and people from other European nationalities. Bulfin's book is a curious and significant linguistic document in which Irish-Gaelic and Spanish are discovered threading through the Irish-English dialogues, fluctuations which give an account of the ups and downs of the adaptation of the Irish into the Argentine society.

This collection of short stories was serialized in *The Irish Argentine* and *The Southern Cross*, Irish immigrants' newspapers. Eventually, in 1900, the stories were published in book format under the title *Tales of the Pampas*.

Who was the author? *The Mercier Companion to Irish Literature* entry states:

Bulfin, William (1864-1910), journalist, was born in Derrinlough near Birr in County Offaly, and educated in Birr, Banagher and Galway Grammar School. Emigrating to Argentina in 1884, he was a pampas cowboy for four years before becoming a contributor to and eventual editor of the *Southern Cross* (sic), a paper run for the Irish community in Buenos Aires. Returning to Ireland in 1902, he became a strong supporter of Arthur Griffith and traveled about Ireland on

69. Thomson, B. (1979). Ramón and B. T. In *Ramon Writes* (p. 9). Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires Herald.

his bicycle. The pieces written about his tours for the *United Irishman* and *Sinn Féin* were collected in the slightly misnamed *Rambles in Eirinn* (1907). The book is nationalist, showing a strong bias against Northern Protestants and West Britons, and contains some of the unthinking anti-Semitism of the day. He died at his birthplace.

Curiously, not a word is said about *Tales of the Pampas*, his true contribution to Irish-Argentine culture.

Bulfin concluded his formal education at the Royal Charter School in Banagher and at Queen's College, in Galway, and, in 1884, together with his brother Peter, migrated to Argentina. The future writer was about twenty years old, and spent twelve years in Buenos Aires. At the time the Bulfins stepped on the country, their uncle, Father Vincent Grogan CP, was the Argentine Provincial of the Passionist Fathers. It was thanks to Father Grogan's connections with the Irish that the boys were able to work in the "camp" in touch with their own people and the *gauchos*<sup>70</sup>. William Bulfin finally took a position as a *capataz* (foreman) in an *estancia* (ranch) owned by Juan Dowling (from Longford), located in Ranchos. It was there that he fell in love with Anne O'Rourke (from Ballacurra), whom he married in 1891. At this time he moved to town, but it is clear that this experience in the country, close to the Irish, natives and different kinds of migrants, gave him material for what became *Tales of the Pampas*.

In Buenos Aires he taught English, worked as an employee for H. C. Thompson, a furniture maker, and started contributing articles and stories to *The Southern Cross*. Bulfin was soon sub-editing the paper and quickly became both proprietor and editor. It was in *The Southern Cross* that in 1902 he wrote: "And now I am off for a change, to look for the excitement of a sea-voyage (...)." The result of the experience was his best known and best-selling book, *Rambles in Eirinn*, which includes references to his South American incursion.

70. A loose equivalent of the North American "cowboy", the *gaucho* was a resident of Argentina's extensive grasslands and plains known as the *pampa*.

Back in Ireland, he got involved with the nationalist cause, mainly with the language matter. Although he was not a regular Irish speaker, he shared the idea that language was intrinsic to identity, and, in fact, he provided financial aid to the American Gaelic League through *The Southern Cross*.

(...) what surprised and heartened them was the support that the League received from the Irish in South America, the Irish of Buenos Aires led by the editor of its Irish immigrant paper, the *Southern Cross* (1875), William Bulfin. The Gaelic League would, in turn, shape and focus Bulfin's cultural nationalism.<sup>71</sup>

In 1904 he returned to Argentina where he was conferred the papal title of Knight of Saint Gregory for what he had achieved in favor of the Irish Catholic community. He left in 1909 for good and that same year he sailed off to the United States with the purpose of interesting wealthy Irish Americans in founding a Sinn Féin<sup>72</sup> newspaper, a project that eventually failed.

After a few months back in Ireland, he died in February 1910.

*Tales of the Pampas* was published in London, in 1900, by T. Fisher Unwin for the series which included other "exotic" books like *The Ipané*, by R. B. Cunninghame Graham; *In Guiana Wilds*, by James Rodway; *A Corner of Asia*, by Hugh Clifford; *Negro Nobodies*, by Noël de Montagnac; and *Among the Man-Eaters*, by John Gaggin. Bulfin's collection belongs to the same literary tradition of Anglo-Argentine writers such as Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936) and William Henry Hudson (1841-1922), but he differs from these authors in his concern for language and literary intention.

The book consists of eight narrations: "A Bad Character":

71. Murphy, M. (2001). The Cultural Nationalism of William Bulfin. In Londraville, J., & Londraville, R. (Eds.). *John Quinn. Selected Irish Writers from his Library* (p. 47). West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press.

72. Meaning "we ourselves", Sinn Féin is an Irish republican political party founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905.

the story of Sailor John, “a deserter from the crew of a British merchant vessel” who “was a knockabout, or camp *atorrante*”, very unpopular among Irish, Gallegos and natives; “The Enchanted Toad”, a funny story of the fantastic that Maureen Murphy relates to Mark Twain’s “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”<sup>73</sup>; “El High-Life”: an effective tragedy, rich in symbolic elements with the following melting-pot performers: Basques, Spanish, Irish and Criollos; “Castro Telleth of Tavalonghi’s Horse”: a wonderful short piece of *bildungsroman* and a song to the horse as symbol of freedom, with “The Defeat of Barragán” as a sequel which concludes with “Campeando”; “The Fall of Don José”: a funny story in which we learn that “in the camp, any man who speaks English is an inglés”; and “The Course of True Love”, an account of a humorous love story which concentrates the effective components of Bulfin’s style: colorful descriptions, credible characters, strong dialogues and humor.

The stories were published neither with additional explanations nor footnotes: it was unnecessary since Bulfin was addressing the Irish-Argentine community in their own peculiar language.

Who were these Irish people? In her brief and clear introduction to the bilingual edition of *Tales of the Pampas*, Susan Wilkinson gives an answer:

The Irish who emigrated to Argentina in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of Bulfin’s tales, were essentially from the midland counties of Westmeath, Offaly and Longford. Like Bulfin, most gravitated to the pampas where so many of their countrymen were establishing themselves in sheep and cattle farming and where wages were high and land prices low. The “seven parishes” alluded to in “The Course of True Love” were mostly likely the towns around Salto, in the province of Buenos Aires –Carmen de Areco, San Antonio de Areco, Navarro, San Andrés de Giles, Chacabuco, Chivilcoy and, of course, Salto itself. Once inhabited by Indians and beyond the pale of European settlement, these towns attracted Irish immigrants –so much so

73. Maureen Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

that the Irish had their own schools and their churches with priests sent out from Ireland.<sup>74</sup>

The rest of the characters are members of the South American melting pot –mainly Italians and Spaniards, but also Basques and British– showing up on the pampas at the time the gauchos were vanishing. The wire fence, which was introduced by Richard Newton in 1845 and expanded by Francisco Halbach ten years later, is certainly a symbol of the limitations gauchos were being subjected to. The book is clearly written in the tradition of realism; however, the gaucho and his context provide a somewhat romantic atmosphere.

Andrew Graham-Yooll wrote that these stories “were so well received that *The Review of the River Plate* declared them far better and more up-to-date than the writings of Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham.” A former editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald*, Graham-Yooll also gives his own opinion:

The fascination of *Tales of the Pampas* lies in that many a descendant of Irish stock will recognize their own forebears in these tales. Honest farmers, struggling to make a decent living and give their families a future, come face to face with congenital rogues, thieves, fantasists and a gallery of colorful vagrants. The clash and contrasts of cultures and customs is told always with underlying humor, and the recreation of the language of origin is a constant brain-teaser.<sup>75</sup>

The historical background in which the stories are set is that of the modernization of Argentina, the successful attempt to become part of the wealthy civilized world. The visible face of this process was the so-called *Generación del 80*: a prominent ruling class moved by the European-inspired ideas of Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. It was during this period that the liberal credo, the development of political parties and the European immigration were promoted.

74. Wilkinson, S. (1997). Introduction. In *Tales of the Pampas* (not paginated). Buenos Aires: LOLA, 1997.

75. *Buenos Aires Herald*, December 3, 1997, p. 13.

In more than one way *Tales of the Pampas* reissues Sarmiento's antinomy proclaimed in *Civilización y Barbarie* (1845) already mentioned: barbarism (represented by the civilization [city], vs. countryside), Europeans vs. natives.

In this singular collection<sup>76</sup> Bulfin reproduces the Irish-Porteños' way of speaking, which results in a mixture of Irish-English, Spanish and certain Irish-Gaelic voices. His stories show that the Irish were doing with language what they had already done with their lives, namely, they were trying to integrate it to their new situation.

"The Course of True Love" opens with a series of considerations on the Irish settlers:

Exile has, of course, modified some of their idiosyncrasies and accentuated others. The wilderness has taught them some of its mysteries, has sharpened some of their senses and faculties that would in other conditions of life have remained comparatively dull; has, to some extent, increased their natural sensitiveness and deprived them of some of their spirituality, as well as taken the corners and angles off their Celtic mysticism. Spanish phrases and idioms have inflected the English which they habitually use; but the brogue of Leinster and Munster has remained intact. Spanish and Creole customs have, in a greater or less degree, insensibly woven themselves into their life; but they are unwilling to admit this, and their struggle to preserve the traditions of the motherland is constant and earnest.<sup>77</sup>

The writer affirms that exile modified "some of their idiosyncrasies and accentuated others". Although he does not elucidate further on this, it is nevertheless clear that their migration to a different culture and way of life, changed, to some extent, the social attitudes and activities of this twentieth-century Irish-Argentine émigré community. A friendly and gregarious attitude seems to have been the most frequent character trait associated with these migrants as evidenced in

76. In 1910 Alberto Gerchunoff, a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe, published *Los gauchos judíos*, a series of fictional stories related to the Jews in Entre Ríos. In conception and intention, both works are similar.

77. Bulfin, W. (1900). *Tales of the Pampas*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, pp. 206-207.

Bulfin's stories and in other historical chronicles and sources of this era; this is also confirmed in the author's assertion that these Irish settlers were sometimes overcome by the powerful force of the native "idiosyncrasy," a hot-tempered nature that emerged on occasions and overshadowed their natural outlook so as to deprive them "of some of their spirituality," and which knocked the corners from their apparent "Celtic mysticism." Considering that Bulfin believed that language and identity were intimately connected, he also accomplished that process by incorporating linguistic correlation and adaptation: "Spanish phrases and idioms have inflected the English which they habitually use; but the brogue of Leinster and Munster has remained intact."

Susan Wilkinson rounds off the idea by giving examples:

Bulfin delighted in the Midlands brogue of his fellow countrymen's speech, and he strove to reproduce it by his pen as it fell upon his ears. (...). Some of his phrases are old English and are no longer or rarely used, such as "for the nonce", meaning "at the moment," "for the particular purpose," and "without," meaning "outside".<sup>78</sup>

Even though there is no direct reference to the Irish tongue, the narrator introduces solitary Irish words; not as many as those in Spanish, being regularly sprinkled within the narrative. This is symptomatic of a deeper experience: that of the speakers who in a gradual but inevitable process were possessed by the language of their new land; it also explains the weakening of the Irish-Gaelic tongue, finally dropped.

Examples:

*Musha*<sup>79</sup> the dickens a doubt, Misther Tim Shanahan, yerself and your frog! (p. 49)

What the dickens are you lookin' at, you snakin' undher had *bocaugh*? (p. 52)

78. Wilkinson, S. *Op. cit.*

79. *Musha*: "well" or "indeed", it can be used positively or negatively, depending on the context; *bocaugh*: "beggar"; *garrahalya*: "girl"; *oncha*: "fool"; *alannah*: "child" (expression of affection).

I'm going over to Joe Hagan's to give him a hand to coort that *garrahalya* he's afther, and I won't be back until late. (p. 209)

Don't be goin' gabblin' an' makin' an *oncha* of yourself whin we go over to Dooley's. (p. 211)

It's Julia that will have somethin' to say to it wan way or t'h other. Eh, Julia, *alannah*, what would you say to gettin' an offer of a fine presentable rock of a husband? (p. 224)

Mainly referred to camp activities and gauchos, their sayings and habits, a range of about forty Spanish words (sometimes misspelled) contribute to enrich the linguistic melting pot:

The dirty blackguard! To go away like that, and *quien sabe*<sup>80</sup> (sic) if he hasn't taken some of my things with him. (p. 18)

Francisco was behind the counter when I went into the *pulperia*<sup>81</sup> (sic), and to see the grin on that crooked ould Gallego's face when he bid me good morning, would make you sick. (p. 20)

You consider it strange, eh? Ah! But my *companionero* (sic), (companion)<sup>82</sup>, "did I not say that the horse was an animal the most intelligent? And, all the same, this Tavalonghi's bayo had never demonstrated any surpassing cleverness." (p. 107)

"*Entre bueyes no hay cornadas*,"<sup>83</sup> he corrected with a smile, quoting the time honored pampa *refran* (sic). (p. 114)

Beardless boys in *alpargatas*, whose riding gear would not sell for a dollar, called "pago" (translated as *done*) for fifty cents; and they called each other "señor," and "compañero" and "amigo" with as much style and swagger as their elders showed in arranging for bets of \$ 50 or more. (p. 118)

80. "¿Quién sabe?", in fact: "Who knows?"

81. "*Pulpería*": local store.

82. Curiously, the narrator felt that he had to translate such a common word.

83. The equivalent in English of this Spanish saying (*refrán*) would be "There's honor among thieves."



The word *alpargatas* went through two stages: a) Originally a trademark, which became a synonym of a local slipper; b) Bulfin incorporates the word to his Irish-English text.

Note in the following lines the typical Spanish question tag stuck into the English sentence:

That's it, *compañero*; but do it softly, *eh*? And do it soon. (p. 120)

What an early start the old *bayo* wanted to make, *no*? (p. 134)

The famous porteño vocative *che*, which I also incorporated in the title of this thesis for considering it a symbolic representation of this adaptation stage, is also here:

Who was he, *che*? (p. 173)

In page 188 we are surprised by an unexpected, vulgar locution:

*La gran siete!*<sup>84</sup> Don Tomás, what intelligence!

These samples show what the whole book reveals: the slow but constant process of linguistic transferences, acquisitions and replacements on behalf of the Irish settlers, an operation that implied a social and cultural interaction. This interaction, however, shows aspects that the narrator does not conceal, perhaps to better understand the slowness of the adaptation experience. For instance, in “Campeando” one of the Irish characters goes to a fundamental question related to the natives:

You're gettin' too much of the country into you, me boy – racin', and bettin', and helpin' the natives to cut each other to pieces, and galavantin' round the seven parishes suckin' mate an' colloquerin' with the gauchos□ that's all right while it lasts.

84. A kind of an untranslatable curse, *La gran siete!* literally means “The great annus!”

But you'll get a bad name for yourself, take my words for it. (...) If you're always stuck with the natives behind the galpon (sic)<sup>85</sup> instead of attendin to your good name, you'll be sent with them, and you'll get into their ways, and the day'll come when the dickens a decent man in the country will have anything to say or do with you. (p. 164)

Notes of discord also crept into the relationships among the Europeans themselves: "This Tavalonghi he was an Italian hide-buyer in Lujan (sic) ten years ago and he made a fortune out of your countrymen (...)" (pp. 104-105). Even the Irish and British antagonism is transferred to the pampas: "What are you talking about, you H-H-Hirish hass?" sez the sailor." (p. 36). By reading these stories we also learn that ethical misbehavior, mainly regarding politics and justice, involve a long story in this country.

Due to conscious and unconscious reasons, the transformation would be a gradual event, and for years English, in its Westmeath version, prevailed. Bulfin himself explains this and his writing successfully shows its different inflections, accents and intonations:

What's that? In the name of goodness can't you speak in plain language and try to make it easy for yourself to get out what you want to say and make it easy for them that's listenin' to you to understand what you mean? (p. 16)

"Good mornin', gintlemin," sez he in Spanish, "how goes it, Miguel?" sez he to me.

"Purty well," sez I. "Have you any news?," sez I.

"No," sez he, "nothing sthrange, Miguel," sez he. I asked him to have a tot, and while the Gallego was fillin' it out for him, what do you think he doesn't up and ask if the sailor was around the place. (pp. 20-21)

"All right! Never fear. I'll stuff them. Lave 'em to me wud all confidence, Tim". "Well, you'll be seein' a frog, too, hoppin' about the flure. Don't molest him. Lave him to himself. He's an

85. *Galpón*: shed.

owld friend. If you intherfare wud him or inconvenience him in any way, I'll shake the livers out of you whin I come back –d'ye hear?" (p. 44)

The Irish tried to protect their identity by preserving a language which, in fact, was not their own. But the Irish accent is always there. And even nowadays visitors from Old Ireland are surprised at the Irish-Porteño's brogue, the strong tone, inflections, pronunciation and outdated locutions; it is a speech that has become a linguistic Noah's ark.

The dichotomy of Civilization versus Barbarism –one of the main themes in Argentine literature– is openly explored in *Tales of the Pampas*, an immense country as inhabited by a vast and diverse range of people and communities, natives and gauchos included. "Fatalist", "scamp", "barbarian", "bucktoe" and other words of negative connotation are attributed to the *gauchos*, but at the same time the narrator's attitude is that of understanding. Through curious situations, humor and effective dialogues we feel the narrator's sympathy for his characters.

*Tales of the Pampas*, by William Bulfin, is an important literary document mainly because of its social and cultural implications. Showing the life of the Irish in the Argentine countryside and their attitudes towards the host society they are willing to adapt to, and their new life as lived in their adopted country –as seen through a linguistic prism– is an original contribution to our understanding of mingling of cultures and ethnic adaptation at this historical moment.

Finding a meaning to the world and to human existence is one of the functions of culture. Clifford Geertz wrote that "Understanding the form and pressure of, to use the dangerous word one more time, natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke (...) than it is like achieving communion."<sup>86</sup> This seems to have been Bulfin's

86. Geertz, C. (1983). *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, p. 70.

way in his commitment to better understand the people of the Argentine countryside and become one of them.

Integrated to the host society, Bulfin's characters become bilingual and, little by little, bicultural. It is a parallel process in relation to their lives.

According to Steiner (2009), truly changes in sensibility and personal status are necessary for a writer to become bilingual or multilingual. Though he was close to this experience, it was not, yet, Bulfin's case. Making use of an effective image by Steiner, Bulfin was hardly able to open a "second window" to human landscape by learning the strange language and deeply understanding its syntax. *Tales of the Pampas* is a landmark in Irish-Porteño literature, a document that offers occasional glimpses of a different reality which scarcely surpasses a monochromatic point of view. The book is the halfway point between the adaptation and assimilation of the Irish migrants in Argentina.

William Bulfin was also the author of an unpublished novel called *A Man of the Pampas. A Story of Camp life in the Argentine Republic*.

#### 4. Irish-Porteños speaking

I complete this chapter with a selection of interviews with Irish-Porteños who, in more than one way, represent the feelings and the ideas of a stage previous to the one they should belong to, considering their age. The fact is that they feel more Irish than Argentine, namely they have not yet assimilated into the new culture, the culture their grandparents saw as an option. My interviews (these and the ones we will see in Chapter V) are focused on the working class, the social segment in which the emblematic linguistic variations occurred and developed. The "rich Irish", interrelated with the local upper class, polished their language adjusting it to the Standard English spoken in commercial, cultural and political circles. The well-off young Irish-Porteños were sent back to Europe to improve their education, as it happened with the Nevin sisters: their prose reveals their accuracy and knowledge of the English language; in their novel *You'll Never Go Back*, their version of

the Irish-Porteño language, although functional to the story, appears somewhat artificial.

See the complete interviews in Appendix 3.

#### SPEAKER 1

T. C. (Female). Age: 75. Recorded on July 31, 2002, at her home in Villa Devoto (Buenos Aires).

T. C. did her primary school at St. Brigid's, in Buenos Aires. She gives a brief account of her experience with the Sisters of Mercy at that Irish-Porteño institution. She also refers to her first job. Married to an Irish-Porteño, they had eight children who were sent to parish schools not linked to the Irish community. Her Spanish is perfect but she will feel highly offended if you correct her English that is frequently influenced by Spanish pronunciation: when she says "lucky" [u:] or adapts Spanish words, creating neologisms or interpolates Spanish expressions, "pension" [e], instead of "boarding house", and others. "Should" frequently appears introducing an explanatory clause. Influenced by the Argentine use of Spanish verbs, she avoids the present perfect tense and the past perfect continuous tense.

When I was leaving, I kept watching at a round tin sewing box, placed over the cupboard, featuring a picture on the lid of Elizabeth II the day she became queen, in 1952. "A friend of mine brought it to me from England," she bragged. The situation conveys a deep truth more or less common in her days: due to ignorance, indifference or status, confused with the British, the Irish-Porteños rarely marked the difference. (Argentina is an anglophile country.)

(...) They were very strict in Religion. Every Friday we had to go to confession, and on Sundays, if Sister Superior saw us going to communion without confessing, she would stop us and say: "I didn't see you confessing!" The priests, the Passionist Fathers, were very kind in confession... *should* we were only kids! I used to go to confession with Father Frank, who was a very old man. He used to tell us that everybody could change for the better. He was once found drunk in a *zanja*. He used to tell us that he was a kind of a scamp. (...)

That was Father Frank. I don't remember his surname. (...) At school they never spoke about the facts of life. Never, never. We were ignorant. My companions thought me the wrong way. They taught us religion in a cruel way. They used to say: "Remember that the doors of hell are always open for you!" One day the Superior came into the room and we didn't *dar cuenta* it was cold and we had the windows open. She shouted: "Mad! Madder than mad!"(...).

At that time, especially if you knew English well, *sexto grado* was enough. When I left Saint Brigid's, I went to a private teacher, Mrs. Kelly, to improve my English and learn short-hand. (...) I lived with my family in Villa Urquiza, and then in Santos Lugares. Most of my friends lived in the Irish Girls' Home, an old institution. My mother lived there when she came from the *camp*. (...) There was an old lady... she was very cross... She had a *pension*-house... and she used to go to the home, looking for girls who wanted to work there. (...) In Santos Lugares there was so many Irish! In calle Calixto Oyuela there was a big *conventillo* full of old maids.

## Speaker 2

L. D. (Male). Age: 72. Recorded on August 30, 2002, at *The Southern Cross* office, in Buenos Aires.

L. D. did his primary school at the Fahy Farm, in Moreno (Buenos Aires). He immediately started working as an office-boy in town, that job was the beginning of his career in American Companies. L. D. considers himself a self-made man, he appears to be happy with the family he was able to bring up, and he is constantly grateful to what he received from the Irish boarding school. Married to O., from an Italian family, the fact strengthened his Irishness. At a certain moment of the interview, knowing that he is third generation, he assures: "We, the Irish...". He is also creative and comic with certain personal expressions, such as: "We were all from Irish stuff." As it happens in the Spanish language in relation to Argentine speakers, L. D., as an Irish-Porteño, avoids the present perfect tense. L. D. is conscious of his particular (limited) English language. He even laughs at the way the Irish-Porteños speak. He usually speaks in plural, as he is referring to his schoolmates. Retired, L. D. worked at the office of *The*

*Southern Cross*; nailed to one of the walls there was a framed copy of the poem “If”, by Rudyard Kipling, the official poet of the British Empire.

L. D. declares that he loves Argentina but the real thing is that he considers himself Irish and devotes all his social life to that community.

Note the syntax that frequently sticks to the Spanish pattern. “Affortunately” (after the Spanish word *afortunadamente*, instead of “fortunately”) is a good example of typical Irish-Porteño inventions.

I was born in the *camp*, as they call it here. In the province of Buenos Aires.

When I was 5 or 6 years old, *I started to go to school on horseback*. And when I was 9, they sent me to the Fahy School, in Capilla (Capilla del Señor, Province of Buenos Aires). I remember that I had to fill in a form, and where it said “Born”, I wrote “yes”, meaning that I was a living guy. In Capilla I spent three years, from 1939 to 1941. Then I was transferred to the Moreno section for elder students. *I spent in Moreno* four years *and I finished the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, 1945*, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December of the same year, that means ten days later, *I started to work* in a company called David Hog, who *were* the owners of the City Hotel, and there I spent four years.

In 1945 we came from General Pinto, the countryside where we lived, to Santos Lugares. We had relatives who were living there and they found a place where we could rent a house. The owner of the house in calle Calixto Oyuela was an Irish *fella* (sic) called Ennis, doctor Ennis.

(...) *At David Hog, I started learning those accounting machines which in those days they paid very well, so, without going to the Faculty of Economy, I learnt through those NCR accounting machines...* (...). *The little English that I can speak I learnt in the Fahy*, and at home. But then we started *losing* it at home. *Affortunately* (sic), as from 1965 I started to work in American companies. I answered an ad from Dow Chemical in the newspaper, and I don’t know whether I was lucky or not but it was there that I met my (future) wife. We have been married since 1957. (...)

By 1954, some former pupils founded the Fahy Club. I joined them. *We were all from Irish stuff*. The Fahy Club was one of the

only Irish groups at that time. Twice a month we would have a dance, and for lunch, we, the Irish, *joint* (sic) together, once or twice a week, in a restaurant called “Criterion”, and in another place called “Cable”, in calle Sarmiento. (...)

We used to *go out with* the girls of St. Brigid’s. We were all single, *trying to make up something*. Some of us had their *fiancée* in Salguero 550 (see Chapter I). Father Fidelis would say: “Marry your own!” (...)

When I meet Irish people, they say: “You are like one of our own. You have our accent. And you are third generation!” I was brought up by an Irish family; the Fahy Institute was run by Pallottine priests who were Irish. What can you expect?

Here, in *The Southern Cross*, where I work now, I’m always exposed to Irish speakers... Although I am not fluent as in Spanish, I’m able to manage with my English.

#### SPEAKERS 3, 4 and 5

L. G., M. G. and I. G. (sisters). Age: won’t tell (circa 75). Recorded on July 29, 2004, at their home in Mercedes (Province of Buenos Aires).

This family is paradigmatic of closed immigrant groups: after becoming a widower, their grandfather went off to Ireland and came back with a new Irish wife; they attended only Irish schools; they did not intermarry till the generation of the speakers, two of whom, by the way, married European, not natives; reading *The Southern Cross* was a must, “like going to mass”; they were not critical on the way they had been educated, even if that meant bachelorhood or spinsterhood. They were, then, still, in their way to adaptation. Language expresses this situation: moderate Spanish voices appear threading through their speech: *campos, fiestas, truco*... certain prepositions appear based on a Spanish model, the same with “mixed school”, as in Spanish, instead of “coeducational”. In a different sense, the tone is derogatory when referring to the “Official English” taught according to the national syllabus. Finally, a certain dish, the legendary, basic “dumplings”, has been preserved for generations, perhaps as a symbol of the original social condition of the immigrants.



L. G.: We are from Florida, partido de San Andrés de Giles. We were just in the limit of Mercedes.

M. G.: Our grandfather came from Ireland and married an Irish-Argentine.

I. G.: I think she was Irish...

L. G.: She died when the first child was born. (...) When his wife died he went back to Ireland and back with our granny. They came to Giles. I don't know if they bought *campos* or they were given *campos*... they were colonizing or something like that...

M. G.: They started being sheep-farmers. (...)

I. G.: There was a strong Irish community here. (...) His sisters were only supposed to go to the gate... and they all died without being married. *That was typical Irish... the same, the boys... all bachelors... They died young.*

L. G.: We were educated at St. Mary's, in San Antonio de Areco. (...) Our brothers, in Clonmacnoise...

I. G.: ... they *started in* Clonmacnoise!

L. G.: Yes, and then they went here, *in* St. Patrick's.

M. G.: It still exists, but it isn't an Irish school anymore... they teach the Official English... it is a *mixed school* now...

L. G.: We were connected through the Church, we had dances, we did all here in Mercedes. Our father married an Irish girl who lived here in Mercedes. (...)

I. G.: We always received *The Southern Cross*... *it was like going to mass*. We had to read *The Southern Cross*, then it was all in English.

M. G.: We knew people from Buenos Aires who lived here in Mercedes (...). My small girl went to St. Brigid's...

I. G.: We don't have a strong Irish community now, very few... and not very young(...) *up to our generation we married our own people. Then they married Italians, Argentines...*

I. G.: ... I could have married... I knew lots of (Irish) boys but I didn't, *I married a French...*

M. G.: *When I married an English descent*, we received the *Buenos Aires Herald*.

L. G.: But never at home. (...)

M. G.: In the past the Irish community here was very important, we had very nice fiestas. (...). When we were very small, they played hurling here...

I. G.: ... Very often...

M. G.: Sí, the priests from St. Patrick's played and some of

the teachers played and people from about here. (...) And there are people who play *truco* and don't know how to play forty-five! It's very like bridge, more or less.

L. G.: We all play... in the *camp* with the Morrows, the Gaynors, the Thompsons, the Morgans, Duffys, Rooneys... No, no, the Rooneys are from Venado Tuerto.

M. G.: Oh, yes! *They came on the brick, rain or no rain...* (...) I still make Irish dumplings; I prepare them with flour, salt and milk. We love potatoes, potatoes in their jackets. We are all specialists in plum-puddings.

These conversations show the conscious or unconscious will of adapting speakers' lives to a different civilization, but without forgetting the Irish legacy made not only of language but of all kinds of cultural expressions.

#### ADDENDUM

In 1845 an Irish immigrant from Westmeath started keeping a diary which he gave up in 1864. Originally written in English, the only published version is the Spanish one, translated and edited by Eduardo Coghlan in 1981. *Andanzas de un irlandés en el campo porteño (The Customs and Habits of the Country of Buenos Aires from the Year 1845, by John Brabazon, and his own adventures)* is not only the first important document on the struggles of the Irish trying to improve themselves in the Argentine camp, but a work of certain literary value as well. Brabazon, an Irish-Protestant (a fact that Coghlan seems to ignore) gives a powerful account of his subject. Precise descriptions and comic or tragic situations are wisely presented with an amusing narrative rhythm in the Irish-English way described in Chapter II.

(...) we went up to a boarding house that was kept by a man the name of Michael Heavy where we were met by my brother and other friends from the old country. That night one of the young fellows invited me to the theatre, but brought me to a diferent (sic) place to a house of bad fame, where I was surrounded (sic) by young ladys (sic); as my friends disapierd (sic) and left me alone without knowing the language, I began to get a little scared; and I gave them all the cash I posest (sic)

not knowing what it was worth, as brother Tom changed the little money I brought out.

Regardless of adversity, an essential optimism pervades the whole book, even when the narrator refers to criminal episodes. But the tone changes when he alludes to that typical and despicable South American figure which is the dictator. Brabazon's work coexisted with the bloody dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1835-1852), loved by the Irish living in the countryside because he defended them from the Indians. In spite of this, the writer is surprised at the way the infamous tyrant enslaved lives naturally free.

Brabazon's work concerns people from different social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, he refers to amazing episodes such as the murder of his wife and sister in law, and to a multi-ethnic *estancia* where French, German, English and natives coexist. He stresses a difference between natives and European migrants, but his memoir is not Manichean: drinkers, gamblers and ungrateful Irish are also alive in his chronicle, which conveys the atmosphere of a *Bildungsroman*.

Language is pointed out as a serious problem which does not prevent the narrator from trying to conquer Cervantes' tongue.

Realist and optimist at the same time, Brabazon's papers prove that we all have at least one story to tell.

Cultural tensions in need of distension, Spanish language undermining the Irish-English language, people willing to be part of an Irish-Argentine group, historical events within the Irish-Argentine community enlightening new directions, even to its "closed" members, and a general and traumatic national sensation of strangeness and confusion caused by the immigration to Argentina as a whole (where the Irish were part) is what we found when exploring the second stage of the story of the Irish in Argentina.

Ideological and political elements placing the country in a practical state of siege, and changes in the Catholic Church after Vatican Council II, together with the decay and destruction of paradigmatic Irish-Argentine institutions, will be the context

in which the *visible* Irish-Argentina community will assist to its assimilation into the National project or virtual disappearance. One more time, language, with the foreseeable preponderance of the Argentine tongue, will give an account of this part of the narration, as we will see in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

### The Assimilation Stage

*Oh Brian Boru  
I shit on you!*

R. J. Walsh, "Earthly Responsibilities"

#### *1. A different context*

I remember having read, many years ago (probably during the late seventies) a letter addressed to *The Southern Cross*, complaining because the Irish community had not been invited by the Porteño Government to take part in the Foreign Communities Fair (Feria de Colectividades Extranjeras). The hard reply the reader got from the editor (Fred Richards) was that the Irish-Argentines had not been invited because of the simple reason that the Irish in Argentina did not exist anymore as an isolated group, they were now an active part of the national society. Father Richards himself was responsible for turning *The Southern Cross* from a bilingual paper (English/Spanish) into a monolingual one (Spanish), a gradual practice he started during the sixties, "for the sake of keeping in touch with the new generations," as he explained.

The new generations, as a whole, began deserting the traditional Irish-Argentine centers and intermarrying, putting, in this way, a definitive end to the exclusion of the "natives" or "blacks". Accordingly, decadence of those paradigmatic institutions became worse and many of them were closed, sold, transferred or demolished: schools like St. Paul, in Capitán Sarmiento, Clonmacnoise and St. Mary's in San Antonio de Areco, Fahy Farm, in Capilla del Señor, Keating Institute, in the Province of Buenos Aires; Saint Patrick's Home, in Villa Elisa... adding that, because of lack of vocations, traditional Irish-Porteño Catholic congregations reduced their organization: the Pallottines closed their novitiate in Mercedes (Buenos Aires), the Passionate Fathers left their Retreat House and

Parish in Colonia Caroya, their Parish Church and School (St. Gabriel's) in Vicente López (Buenos Aires), and sold their mythical Monastery, in Capitán Sarmiento, including the cemetery: a sad symbol of the conclusion of an era in Irish-Argentina. The Hurling Club, traditionally a snobbish and closed organization, is now open to whoever wants to join in because the Irish-Porteños are a minority. Not to speak of the crumbling Fahy Club. The Sisters of Mercy, after "opting for the poor", left St. Brigid's to a Chilean congregation, and they also abandoned the Mater Misericordiae Institute. In this context, the Irish Catholic Association is the only standing, strong Irish-Porteño foundation. The ICA runs two schools (St. Brigid's and Monseñor Dillon, where you will hardly find Irish names) and two *estancias*. A non-profit institution, the ICA is an open charitable institute.

Matchmaker Father Fidelis Rush and his "Cross and Shamrock Group" tending to "preserve the values of the Irish race", Prof. Michael Geraghty's private and public classes of Irish language, some dancing groups and the two or three unsuccessful projects to develop Irish Argentine Cultural Institutes (the last one in 1973) were among some of the few last attempts to keep the flame of the Irish-Argentines alive.

Social affairs, immersed in an ideological and factual internal war during the 1970's, were also functional to the division of the Irish community. What became known as "St. Patrick's massacre", a criminal episode that took place on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1976, during the last dictatorship, perpetrated by a paramilitary squad that assassinated the Pallottine community at that Irish church in Belgrano (three priests, two of them well known Irish-Porteños, and two seminarians), revealed a new direction certain sectors of the clergy were taking in terms of political commitment.

In another significant experience, Irish-Porteños were gradually kicked out from their other traditional church, Holy Cross, by a new generation of Passionist priests who cared nothing about the Irish. They were eventually replaced by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo movement.

## 2. The Southern Cross *still alive*.

Now a monthly publication, *The Southern Cross*, edited in Spanish with occasional articles in English, in a way, shows the assimilation of even the Irish-Porteño visible group into their adopted country, Argentina; however, the paper is facing a critical situation, not only financially, but also concerning the obvious fact that, with a circulation of about 1,000 copies, it is addressing an insignificant, unrepresentative audience. Considering that a projecting figure would show that about 350,000 people in Argentina claim Irish ancestry, it is an undeniable certainty that Irish-Argentina, as a whole, is disappearing or has already disappeared.

In her study of the Irish Diaspora in Argentina and Brazil, Laura Izarra devotes a section to *The Southern Cross*, analyzing the graphical design of its successive mastheads or nameplates and mottos. She stresses the 1992 slogan, “*Presencia de la comunidad Argentino-Irlandesa en la Nación*” (“Presence of the Argentine-Irish Community in the Nation”), noting that it was the first time that the community adopted a compound identity, and that the first word, the noun *Argentino* is the nucleus, though modified by the adjective “Irish”; the 1997 statement, adds the essayist, will balance what she calls “the diasporic tenses”: “*Desde 1875 expresando nuestra plenitud argentina, desde lo ancestral irlandés*” (“Expressing our Argentine fulfillment, out of our Irish ancestry, since 1875”).<sup>87</sup> This last proclamation works only as a rhetorical expression, since, as we have seen, at the beginning, within the Irish migrants, there was no serious sign of “Argentine fulfillment”.

It is pertinent to point out the significant role played by translations during the last years. Being mostly monolingual, the paper provides translations related to international affairs and even translations of literary works. This is significant in terms of the readers to whom the newspaper is now addressed. Who are they? What happened to their English?

When Fr. Federico Richards CP began making a political

87. Zuntini de Izarra, L.P. (2011). *Narrativas de la diáspora irlandesa bajo la Cruz del Sur*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, pp. 112 – 113.

use of *The Southern Cross*, many subscribers unsubscribed. The same happened to those who believed that the paper had nothing interesting to offer them or who felt that Ireland was, now, very far, not even the Ideal Island their parents and ancestors dreamt of and were never able to visit.

By dropping the only Irish-Porteño means of communication, the final option was silence.

### *3. Irish-Porteños keep speaking*

This other selection of interviews conveys the attitudes of speakers in relation to their Irish-Argentine identity. It is important to remark that two of them were surprised at the fact that the conversation would be in English (or Irish-English or Irish-Porteño) and not in Spanish.

(The complete texts can also be found in Appendix 3.)

#### SPEAKER 6

P. D. (Male). Age: 71. Recorded on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at his home in Núñez (Buenos Aires).

A former Passionist priest, P. D. is now retired and devotes his time to reading and writing. He is very critical of the Catholic Church in general and on the Passionist congregation in particular. His parents were Irish and they came out to Argentina during the 1950s. P. D. compares the English of the Irish with that of the Irish-Porteños and finds that the Irish-English is much more emotional and expressive. Irish-Porteños, he assures, will rarely use interjections. He believes that Irish-Porteños' language is very personal and intimate on account of certain *nostalgia* for the ancestral land. "Among the Irish-Porteños, you'll hardly find a personality like Bernadette Devlin," he says. But he immediately admits: "Yes, Rodolfo Walsh was one, but the Irish-Porteños are clung to the past." P. D.'s speech is centered on his experience as a member of the Passionist congregation. In relation to this work, his is a special case. His Irish-English is correct, and from a formal point of view his words do not reflect the ideas they convey: that the Irish-Argentine community does not exist anymore; in fact, his speech celebrates the assimilation of the Irish into the National population.



After WWII, the Irish community in itself, bit by bit, disappeared. There was no further immigration. Irish-Argentines started speaking more Spanish than English, and they started marrying non-Irish. Their children didn't speak English and so forth... So consequently, the incidence in the (Passionist) congregation was very poor. For instance, after 1930 there were no Irish Passionists in Argentina. (...) There was an Irish-Argentine bishop, Gilligan, from 9 de Julio... he wanted to be a Passionist, but he couldn't be a Passionist because he didn't know English. His father was Irish, his mother wasn't Irish. (...)

SPEAKER 7

M. C. D. (Female). Age: 81. Recorded on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002 at St. Patrick's Home (Villa Elisa, Buenos Aires).

Member of a well-off family, she got a fine education and, consequently, her English is good. The difference with some of the others interviewees is that she is conscious of the influence of the Spanish language on the Irish-Porteño speech. She is aware of it and she even laughs at it. She introduces some Spanish words for the sake of mocking the Irish-Porteño, a variation to which she devotes certain reflections. Her statement: "My father was all-blood Irish, *but* he worked in the country and he liked the natives," echoes the classic Argentine antinomy.

My grandparents are... were... Irish. *Where were they from? I wish I could tell you. I'm not sure.* I studied with a *gobernanta*. My father married in the States... out of the country, so I was born out there.

I went to different schools in town. I was very friendly with the Irish community. I worked at the Irish Embassy, with Mr. Murphy.

(At St. Patrick's Home) I'm all day reading. I don't read fiction, I read serious books. Thomas Merton. I read many of his books.

Years pass so quickly!

With the British community we were excellent friends.

My father was all-blood Irish, *but* he worked in the country and he liked the natives. He was a real "*criollo*". Here I was always told that my accent was an Irish accent (...).

At home, we generally spoke English, mama was an Argentine, but she preferred speaking in English. In her house

they used to speak English. They didn't have teachers; they had teachers living in the house. And they were very well brought up. (...) When they went to school, they went to Catholic schools, Saint Patrick's... (...) We spoke English but we also spoke Spanish. As you can see, I mix the two things. John, my husband, was different; he spoke English because he had good teachers in the house, his mother used to speak English to him. *I speak Irish-Porteño. People who don't know us, find it funny.*

My parents went to Ireland to celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. (It happened that) they were speaking between themselves... they were speaking Irish-Porteño. It was reported that they were speaking Irish. But they were speaking Irish-Porteño!

I used words in Gaelic, but now I don't remember them. My father spoke English, Gaelic and Spanish. He was a very, very nice old man. He died in 1929. (...)

#### SPEAKER 8

D. K. (Male). Age: 65. Recorded on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004, at his home in Mercedes (Buenos Aires). On July 4, 1976, his brother, a Catholic priest and member of the Pallottine congregation, together with two other priests and two young seminarians, was shot at St. Patrick's Church, in Belgrano (Buenos Aires) by a firing squad related to the 1976-1982 dictatorship. D. K. married an Irish-Porteña in Suipacha (Buenos Aires), worked all his life in the camp and finally moved to Mercedes.

All kind of variations and mistakes can be found in this campman's speech. He knows it and he laughs. Spanish words, English sentences adapted to grammatical Spanish patterns, adaptations, transferences, together with syntax, verbal and prepositional problems appear at his discretion in the conversation. The statement: "*We used to feel ashamed of speaking English before anyone else*", though not frequently admitted, was very common, particularly among youngsters.

We were always connected *with* the Parish. We were reared up in the *camp*. (...) We went to school in the *camp*, with a private mistress who was not Irish. *We went to school in Spanish*. We spoke English at home. My mother worked seven years in Buenos

Aires, before she got married, and she had good Spanish. My father had very poor Spanish. He took everything wrong. *We used to feel ashamed of speaking English before anyone else.* (...) Alfie started *studying* Latin with Fr. O'Brien, here in St. Patrick's. That was the beginning. He used to come in three times a week, he used to *come in horseback to the ruta*... At that time, if you wanted to be a priest, the first thing was to study Latin. He was 12 years old. There was an *awful* connection with the family. (...) When we *would come in here*, to Mercedes, our house was St. Patrick's. We used to remain there two or three days and all that, *in the casa parroquial*. (...) That was the Irish way, and there was a lot of Irish families. In 1947 he went to Seminary, in Rawson. He did not do secondary school. (...) Then, they brought him to San Miguel, to the Colegio Máximo. At those times they didn't do secondary school. And then he went one year to San Antonio de Areco, and done the noviciado with Fr. O'Neill. Fr. O'Neill accompanied him since he was born. In the Colegio Máximo he lived three years. *In '54 he went to Rome for to finish his studies* and be ordained. In '57 his father got sick so the Pallottines decided to bring him back here in 1957, and he was ordained in June of 1957, here in Mercedes, by Monseñor Anunciado Serafín. (...)

#### SPEAKER 9

M. C. (Female). Age: 76. Recorded on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004, in Martínez (Buenos Aires).

M. C. gives an account of her days at the Irish Girls' Home (see Chapter I). She would have preferred to be interviewed in Spanish. As in the previous case, the fragment offers a weak use of the English language in relation to tenses, syntax and vocabulary (neologisms, Spanish words, transferences). Assimilated to the Argentine culture, the speaker's first language is Spanish.

(...)

*The Irish Girls' Home was run by the Sisters of Mercy since many, many years ago... I haven't the date exact.* Aunts of mine, much older than me, *also occasionally lived in the Home.* (...)

Most of us were already working in offices. Girls who left St. Brigid's were very well appreciated in big *enterprises* like English-speaking banks *and lots of companies*... Shell, Esso, Anglo, all those companies...

Sometimes, most of the times, we had to share the room with other girls... There was a bigger room that seven or eight used to share, regardless of the age. That was a problem. *There was only two big rooms*, the *rester* (sic) were smaller. The *frent* (sic), the front of the building, *there were room of two or three girls*; at the back there were bigger rooms. (...)

When a girl was without a job, in the central hall we always had the *Herald*. At that time, in the *Herald* you could *put* a small ad, answer three letters and the next day we had answers from the companies. We could choose a job! The English was important.

Men were allowed to visit the building only in a special parlour. In the middle of the building there was a big *pasillo* looking on to Salguero (street)... For example, another girl used to receive on Saturdays, a short-hand professor. But he *usen't* (sic) to be in the parlour, but in another big *salón* where Sister Mary Egan used to be going about controlling, with all the doors open. She (Sister Mary Egan) was a jack of all trades... all the *quejas* were for her... The Fahy boys were always hanging around Salguero 550. (...)

#### SPEAKER 10

L. R. (Female). Age: won't tell (circa 90). Recorded on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002, at Saint Patrick's Home (Villa Elisa, Buenos Aires).

L. R. offers disjointed glimpses of her life and, in a very curious English language, she gives critical comments on the way English is spoken by the Irish-Porteños, including herself. More than once she interrupted her speech reaffirming that her language is Spanish.

My parents were from Maggiolo (in Santa Fe). *There were lots of Irish, years back*. Our Estancia is called San Patricio. We were nine children in the year 1917, *we didn't fit*. (...) My father had a sister who became a nun... from the Santa Unión... here in town, in *calle Esmeralda*. She died very young, *she was about thirty something*. When my father heard that they had inherited a place in Ireland, a farm, I don't know what, my grandfather didn't want to go back, so he passed it onto his brother who was single, he was M.R. He went to Ireland, married a widow next door, and never came back. My father was with Edward Casey when he founded Venado Tuerto... (*Sorry but I'm used*

to Spanish mostly). The girls went to school in town, to the Esclavas, we were all boarders. Boys went to Marín. They didn't send us to Irish schools because there were not so good.(...). We went back to the *campo*. The *campo* was our life. We loved it. The boys and father worked, we played tennis. No! *We did our bit!* Then, gradually, the elder girls started marrying and now there is nobody there. (...) *The camp, now, is very difficult to live...* you can't get people to work, *nobody wants to do nothing*, not even chop wood, they don't want to go. (...)

We had an English teacher at home. *Most of the estancias did that*. All the nannies *came out from England*. The Irish didn't know how to speak proper English. We received *The Southern Cross* like the Bible, we still have the old ones. (...)

One day they suggested I help here... my grandmother was in the first Committee of St. Patrick's Home, and then my mother, and I followed, and the younger generation they all come and help. All of them. And you can say that they are nearly natives because they married... my sisters married real Argentines! Complete Argentines! *Criollos*. And the children go to the bazaar and work more than the Irish. With more enthusiasm than the Irish. (...) And they have nothing to do with the Irish. *They don't even speak English*.

In 2006, in San Pedro (Buenos Aires), I interviewed the President and the Vice-President of the local Irish Association, two Irish-Argentine ladies. None of them spoke English and both of them ignored the existence of the Irish language.

#### 4. Rodolfo J. Walsh: the "Irish" stories

Born in Patagonia in 1927, Rodolfo J. Walsh belonged to an Irish-Porteño family. All his ancestors were Irish or of Irish descent: his mother was Gill and the other names were Kelly and Dillon. In spite of the fact that at least up to Rodolfo's generation (the third one) Irish-Porteños rarely intermarried, the writer stated that "None of us (...) married an Irish descendant. I suppose we began to get fed up with each other, fed up with cousin Sheila and cousin Maggie."<sup>88</sup> Miguel Esteban Walsh, Rodolfo's

88. McCaughan, M. (2002). *True Crimes. Rodolfo Walsh*. London: Latin America Bureau, p. 17.

father, worked for the Armour meat company, in Buenos Aires, where he met Dora Gill, a telephone operator, whom he married. McCaughan wrote that “she considered English the language of the civilized world and would nurse ambitions of social mobility among their children.”<sup>89</sup> The first part of the statement is true for most of the Irish Argentines, who, little by little, incorporated Spanish voices creating that strange mixture known as Irish-Porteño. Once again language appears as an important topic among Irish Argentine families; Irish-Gaelic was hardly spoken by the Irish in Buenos Aires and it was quickly dropped due to its uselessness. Like many others, Rodolfo Walsh cared nothing about the Irish Argentines, what exemplifies the complete assimilation of his generation, but it was thanks to the inherited English language that he was able to start his career as a writer.<sup>90</sup>

From one of his classmates we know that both in English and in Spanish, two textbooks were central to his formation: the *Concise English for Foreign Students*, by C. E. Eckersley, and *El habla de mi tierra*, by Rodolfo M. Ragucci. Both manuals were conservative in conception, and stuck to academic rules. In this sense, it is notable that Walsh’s literature was, at the same time innovative and fiduciary to the normative grammar. His narrative even ignored the renewal writing techniques, inherited from European and American writers, which were recurrent in Latin American writers of the so called *Boom* during the sixties and seventies.

Later on, he became a journalist, playwright and fiction writer. Four of his short stories refer to his personal experience in Irish-Porteño boarding schools: the one in Capilla del Señor

89. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

90. As soon as he finished secondary school, Walsh took a position in Hachette’s *porteño* office; at that prestigious French publishing house he began working as a proof-reader, and quickly started translating detective novels and short stories for the very popular collections known as “Evasión” and “Serie Naranja”. Finally, he was included in the house’s catalogue as the author of *Variaciones en rojo* (1953) a collection of three detective *novellas*, for which he won the Premio Municipal, which ensured him a monthly extra income, and as the anthologist of the classic *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* (1953).

run by nuns and, afterwards, an institution known as Fahy Farm, in Moreno (Buenos Aires), in charge of the Irish delegation of the Pallottine congregation. McCaughan quotes Rodolfo's brother, Héctor, sixty years later: "It was a military regime, the priests were complete bastards."<sup>91</sup> His other brother, Carlos, believed that "To go from a normal life, in your home, with your family, to that college, taught them to get by but it also destroyed them;" McCaughan adds: "Carlos considers Walsh's life a waste of genius, his literary career blocked by a 'subversive instinct' born of resentment which began inside the Fahy Institute."<sup>92</sup>

In 1968, Walsh gave up writing literature for politics, visited Cuba, became a Marxist and, during the bloody Seventies, he joined Montoneros, an armed movement that supported Juan Perón when he returned to the country and became President of the Republic for the third time. The honeymoon of the old fascist leader with Montoneros lasted till the day the leader publicly referred to them as "stupid and beardless."

In 1977, surrounded by a military firing squad in a street of Congreso neighborhood, in Buenos Aires, it is not clear whether Rodolfo Walsh took his life or was executed.

During his life, he published eight books: fiction, drama and investigations. *Operación masacre* (1957) is considered the first sample of "truth novel" or "new journalism", nine years before Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*.

Walsh expressed his regret in belonging to the Irish community, believing, as he did, that most members of the Irish-Argentine community of his days cared little or nothing about Argentine history. In her study of Walsh, *Rodolfo Walsh. Argentino, escritor, militante* (2006), author Eleonora Bertranou argues that Walsh's generation of intellectuals and activists – many of whom were of European descendant and took part in the revolutionary movements of the sixties and seventies– was the first one to truly feel that their roots were in Argentina.<sup>93</sup>

91. McCaughan, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

93. Bertranou, E. (2006) *Rodolfo Walsh. Argentino, escritor, militante*. Buenos Aires: Leviatán, p. 48.

Despite Walsh's personal ambivalence concerning his Irish-Porteño roots, critics such as Ricardo Piglia, one of the most relevant ones, consider the Irish-influenced narratives written by Walsh to be among the best short stories found in contemporary Argentine literature. He states that Walsh made use of what Joyce defined as a "differed juxtaposition," an expression referred to an unnoticed word that finds its reverberation ten pages after.<sup>94</sup> He also quotes sections of an interview with the writer, in 1970, in which Walsh reports his intention of writing more stories in order to complete a kind of a novel in the form of a collection of tales, admitting that, in a way, they are autobiographical and that they are connected to two different worlds: the Irish and the Argentine.

In this same interview, Piglia referring to these stories, reflects:

–También se conecta con cierta tradición de la literatura en lengua inglesa, digo, porque es un poco cierto mundo del primer Joyce, un poco el tono de Faulkner. Sobre todo en la textura de los cuentos, es escritura que podríamos llamar "bíblica", de algún modo. En este sentido los veo con una personalidad propia en relación con el estilo del resto de tu obra, que tiende a ser más ascético.<sup>95</sup>

Walsh replies:

–Exacto, puede ser. Yo ahí en ese caso más que con Joyce, si bien evidentemente en el *Retrato* y en algunos cuentos e inclusive en el *Ulises*, ya ni me acuerdo, haya algunas historias que transcurren en un colegio de curas, fijate que si yo tuviera que buscar alguna influencia en la forma, es decir en el tipo de estilo que vos llamaste bíblico, es decir en el tipo de desarrollo de

94. Piglia, R. (2013). Prólogo. In Rodolfo Walsh, *Cuentos completos* (p. 11). Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor.

95. "It is also connected with a certain tradition in English literature, because it is, up to a certain point, the world of the first Joyce, with a bit of Faulkner's tone included. Especially in the texture of the short stories; it is a writing that, in a way, could be called "biblical." It is in this sense that I see them with a personal identity in relation with the style of the rest of your work, which tends to be more ascetic."



la frase, lo buscaría tal vez más en Dunsany, que temáticamente no tiene nada que ver.<sup>96</sup>

Between 1904 and 1906, James Joyce (1882-1941) worked on an autobiographical novel called *Stephen Hero*, parts of which were published, posthumously, in 1944. *Stephen Hero* was the first draft of the novel which was eventually to be published as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in 1916. This is the book Rodolfo Walsh read, the one which he refers to. In this work, Joyce gives an account of his Irish family, his life in a boarding school run by the Jesuits, and his critical and rebel attitude towards the education that was being imposed on him. The Irish conservative audience reacted negatively to this story, as it also happened with the Irish-Porteño community in relation to the “Irish stories” written by Walsh. Although still conventional, language, in *A Portrait...*, is a central topic, and the narrator’s rebellion is intellectual or aesthetic. Repeatedly quoted, it is worthwhile remembering what Frank Budgen reported in relation to what he heard from Joyce when he visited him at the time he was writing *Ulysses*: that he had been working all day for the creation of only two single sentences. Rodolfo Walsh’s writing shares this concern with style and the hidden power of words; anyway, their rebellion is quite different: aesthetic in the case of Joyce, social or political in Walsh (“pueblo”, “confrontación”, “batalla”, “autoridad”, “valor”, “fuerza”, “orden establecido”, “derecho”, “tiranizar”, “paliza”, “moretones”, “justicia”, “miserable”, “peones, chacareros, desocupados”, “lucha”, “imposición externa”, “trabajo”<sup>97</sup> are

96. “Exactly, perhaps you’re right. In that case, rather than with Joyce, although evidently in the *Portrait...* and in some short stories, and even in *Ulysses*, I can’t remember now, there are some stories set in a boarding school run by priests, if I had to look for an influence in the formal aspect, I mean in the style you refer as being biblical, namely the way the sentence is developed, I would look for it more in Dunsany, whose themes have nothing to do with mine.” (My translation). Cfr.: Piglia, R. (2007) Prólogo. In Walsh, R. *Los irlandeses* (p. 13). Barcelona: El Aleph Editores. Piglia reproduces sections of his interview with Walsh, published, for the first time, in 1970.

97. “Ordinary people”, “confrontation”, “battle”, “authority”, “courage”, “strength”, “establishment”, “law”, “tyrannize”, “beating”, “bruises”, “justice”,

revealing expressions in, for example, the story called “*El 37*”). Mainly, what we find in Walsh’s writing in relation to Joyce’s autobiographical work is the similar tone and, more than once, an identical atmosphere; a concern for syntax, careful selection of words and, in brief, a very special care and interest for style, a personal mode in the art of writing a story. In both cases this aim is effectively fulfilled and we, readers, never notice, never perceive the patient and hard work which is behind it. Walsh’s Irishness, one more time, appears, then, threading efficiently through his assimilated Spanish (or Argentine) language.

Ricardo Piglia stresses that it is *through style* that Walsh preserved that elegiac world.

The setting for the four stories –“*Los oficios terrestres*” (“Earthly Responsibilities”), “*Irlandeses detrás de un gato*” (“Irish Boys Chasing a Cat”), “*Un oscuro día de justicia*” (“A Dark Day of Justice”) and “*El 37*” (“The 37”)– is the “closed” world of a male boarding school. The stories analyze the everyday struggles of the boarders. Their thoughts and feelings are explored with particular reference to themes such as Justice (or the lack of it), Love (or its absence) and Religion (a particular type of religious identity linked to power) as related to the inner world of Walsh’s Irish-Porteño characters who experience a mixture of isolation, solitude and pessimism at different stages.

This is a self-contained, albeit isolated world, one which comes to mirror Argentine society on a smaller scale, and, indeed, the human condition itself. Walsh’s stories form a microcosm of the Irish in Argentina. Though an isolated community in many ways, it is ultimately enriched by its encounter with other ethnicities and a diverse range of cultural influences.

In 2008 I interviewed John Banville, the Irish novelist. Reflecting on his Irish writer condition, language became the inevitable topic. What he finds particular in his case, and in other Irish writers as well, is the fact that they write in a very singular way, using what is known as the Hiberno-English language which is “enormously rich” and “different” from the

“mean”, “farm workers, farmers, unemployed”, “struggle”, “external impositions”, “work”.

English-English or the American-English. The Irish language, he stated, is “oblique”: you never express yourself directly. In this sense, he considered that the Irish language is more a way of evasion rather than a communicative tool. Though the Irish lost their original language, he stated that there is a deep grammar in the Irish brain: “We speak and write English on the basis of the Gaelic speaker.”<sup>98</sup>

This is true and it can be seen in any of the big names of Irish literature. And the amazing fact, which gives an idea of the mysterious, subtle and powerful strength of language, is that it can survive even in the form of other linguistic expressions. We find this in the four short stories written in Spanish language by Rodolfo J. Walsh that I am examining in this work. As we will see, in “*Irlandeses detrás de un gato*” (“Irish Boys Chasing a Cat”), behind the apparent story there is another one; the same in “*Los oficios terrestres*” (“Earthly Responsibilities”), a microcosm that hides a larger reality. Referring to “*Un oscuro día de justicia*” (“A Dark Day of Justice”), Ricardo Piglia writes:

Lo primero que llama la atención es el modo en que Walsh lee su propio relato. El cuento se lee como la historia de unos chicos irlandeses en un internado católico en la provincia de Buenos Aires, pero también se lee de otro modo. El contexto está cifrado. El relato permite inferir la lectura que propone Walsh, pero su sentido es elíptico y elusivo. La realidad actúa como una clave de lectura externa a la ficción. (...) La ficción exige un lector enterado, muy atento a los indicios y a la reconstrucción de la historia ausente. (...)

And Piglia concludes:

(Walsh) produjo un estilo único, que circula por todos sus textos y por ese estilo lo recordamos. Un estilo hecho con los matices del habla y la sintaxis oral, con gran capacidad de concentración y de concisión.<sup>99</sup>

98. Delaney, J.J. (2008, July 19). Soy un poeta que escribe en prosa. *adnCultura, La Nación*, pp. 24- 28.

99. Piglia, R. *ibid.*, pp. 7-8. (“What first calls our attention is the way Walsh read his own story. The tale is read as a story of Irish boys in a Catholic boarding

The Argentine critic rounds off the idea by alluding to Hemingway's "iceberg technique," according to which what really counts is not shown.<sup>100</sup>

It seems that, like Vladimir Nabokov, Walsh shared the idea that style and structure are the essence of a book.

In opposition to the expansive Spanish language, a laconic manner was another attribute of his singular style. Not for nothing his original model was Jorge Luis Borges, that "English writer" who wrote his works in Spanish. In the "Noticia" (Preface) to his selection *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* Walsh praises Borges for his excellent style, and, in the same book, he considers him the best Argentine short story writer.<sup>101</sup> From Borges he also inherits the economic effect of an accurate use of adjectives.

In "The 37" he states that in the two Irish schools in which he was a boarder, he was able to discover that among his fellow pupils there was a compulsion for prestige, courage and strength. In the same story we are moved by an evocative portrait of his father, an icon of (anonymous) Irish losers:

Un domingo vino mi padre a vernos. Nos dejaron salir a la quinta contigua, sentarnos en el pasto. Abrió un paquete, sacó pan y un salame, comió con nosotros. Sospeché que tenía hambre, y no de ese día. Habló de fútbol, Moreno, Labruna, Pedernera: él y yo éramos hinchas de River. Tal vez habló de política. Era radical. La primera mala palabra que aprendí en casa fue uriburu. Después vinieron otras, fresco, pinedo, justo. Creo que de algún modo las identificaba ya con lo que nos

school placed in the province of Buenos Aires, but it can also be read in another way. The context appears encoded. The story allows us to infer the reading proposed by Walsh, but its reading is elliptic and elusive. Reality works as a reading key external to fiction. The story demands an informed reader, really alert to evidences and to the reconstruction of the missing story"; "He created a unique style that pervades all his texts, and it is for that style that we remember him; a style with the nuances of speech and oral syntax, with a great capacity of concentration and concision.)" (My translation).

100. Ricardo Piglia reflects on the essentials of the art of writing short stories and expands his ideas on the topic in "Tesis sobre el cuento". (See: Piglia, R. (1990) *Crítica y Ficción*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, pp. 83-90).

101. Walsh, R. (1953). *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*. Buenos Aires: Hachette.

estaba pasando, con el plato de sémola. Durante un largo rato fuimos muy felices, aunque lo veía apenado, ansioso de que le dijéramos que estábamos bien. Y, sí, estábamos bien. Después supe lo mal que *ellos* lo pasaban. En realidad estaba aplastado, no conseguía trabajo.<sup>102</sup>

The Radical party he refers to, whose head was Hipólito Yrigoyen, represented the interests and hopes of the immigrants. In this story he mentions his first experience in the Irish school, the fact that at the beginning he would not accept the uneatable food they gave him (ironic considering that, in the end, he was sent to that school as one more remote consequence of the Great Famine in Ireland.) There are also references to the English popular culture of the time: the icon of the old lady in the *Mazawatee* Tea package, the *Webster* English-Spanish Dictionary... and to his relationship with the English language:

Las clases de inglés, en cambio, me entusiasmaron. Mrs. T. me inspiró un profundo cariño. Creo que era viuda y con hijos de los que estaba separada. Su situación era similar a la nuestra, un destierro. La reconstruyo como una mujer de treinta a cuarenta años, de pelo color de arena, nariz ancha, ojos celestes. Una cara nada bonita, llena de fuerza. Tenía una innata dulzura, pero exteriormente era áspera y burlona. Le parecía increíble que yo no supiera una palabra de inglés, cuando mi abuela (fantaseaba) no había aprendido a saludar

102. One Sunday my father came to visit us. We were allowed to go to the adjacent grounds and sit on the grass. He opened his package, produced a piece of bread and salami and ate with us. I suspected that he was hungry, that his appetite was not that of only one day. He spoke of football, Moreno, Labruna, Pedernera: he and I supported the River Plate team. He probably spoke of politics. He was affiliated to the Radical party. The first filthy word I learned at home was *uriburu*; then other words came: *fresco*, *pinedo*, *justo*.<sup>\*</sup> I think that, in a way, I identified these words with the times we were going through, even with the plate of *semolina*. We were very happy for a long while, although I saw him sad, anxious to hear that we were all right. And, yes, we were well. Afterwards, I learnt what *they* were going through. In fact, he was devastated, unable to get a job. (My translation).

<sup>\*</sup>*Urriburu*, *Fresco*, *Pinedo* and *Justo* are the surnames of leaders connected to the first military coup in Argentina, in 1930. (Translator's note).

en castellano. (...) Me esforcé por responder a sus sarcasmos: en quince días estuve al tope de la clase, en un mes admitió que debía pasar al grado siguiente.<sup>103</sup>

As it happens in life, the narrator admits that his first duty at the boarding school was to learn about his identity: who he was and what his position was there. He also learnt about violence: the nuns were hard on them and used to beat them. The narrator compares these circumstances with the ones in another school in Juárez (Buenos Aires), run by Italian nuns, and the different way in which he was treated; the reason, he concludes, is that his parents paid for that other institution, while here, with the Irish nuns, he was nothing but the son of a *chacarero* (farmer).

It is in “Irish Chasing a Cat” that we see in what way the narrator goes through the different stages which will reveal his identity and give him a position in the school, which means in life. The story has elements that resemble the *bildungsroman*, in the sense that it gives an account of the development of a personality. The narrator is nicknamed “El gato” (“The Cat”, an animal frequently related to mystery) and he appears at the Fahy Farm when he was twelve. By taking him there, his mother “was giving birth for the second time (...) and she was also getting rid of him” in an action that was frequent among Irish-Porteño large families at the time. His first attitude is one of resignation or acceptance of fatality. Images of the camp, from where he comes, are in his mind when Father Gormally shows him the school which seems to be a kind of a reformatory. He views some of the 130 boarders whom he would share part

103. But I was enthusiastic about the English classes... Mrs. T. inspired me a deep fondness for her. I think she was a widow with children from whom she was separated. Her situation was similar to ours. She was exiled. Today I remember her as a lady of about thirty, forty years old, sandy hair, broad nose, blue eyes...a not at all nice face but full of strength. She had an innate sweetness but she appeared to be harsh and mocking. The fact that I could hardly say a single word in English, seemed incredible to her since my grandmother (she fancied) had been unable to greet in Spanish. (...) I did my best to give an answer to her sarcasms, and in fifteen days I was the best in the class. After a month's time, she admitted that I should be promoted to the following grade. (My translation).

of his life with. One of them, nicknamed “Pata Santa Walker”, reports that one of his ancestors had been King in Ireland, although his father was a *chacarero*. When another one (Carmody? Delaney? Murtagh?) asks a question that appears to be simple, the narrator gives place to his persuasion of how mysterious language is, how obliqueness (that metaphorical form) nears but not catches the essence of the question.

(...) dijo:

–Cómo te llamas, pibe, planteando el terreno, firme para ellos y para él desconocido, porque pudo sospechar que una pregunta tan sencilla tenía un sentido oculto, y por lo tanto no era en absoluto una pregunta sencilla, sino una pregunta muy vital que lo cuestionaba entero y que debía meditar antes de responder, antes de seguir, como siguió, un curso oblicuo y propiciatorio (...).<sup>104</sup>

The protagonist’s surname was the occasion for the first fight: he was half-Irish: his father’s name was Bugnicourt. And this was a problem since at that time Irish-Porteños rarely intermarried.<sup>105</sup> After dinner, the Cat is forced to run before he is caught by his schoolmates. When he tries to hide in the Chapel, the description we get from what he sees has a negative connotation. Catholicism was an imposition and supported the idea that we are here, in this world, for the sake of suffering.<sup>106</sup> This is a *leitmotif* in the four stories. After more than one battle, the ceremony ends when the Cat faces the others and the “new” boarder is accepted. The story ends with the narrator stating:

104. (...) he said: What’s your name, kid? This way setting out their firm ground, unknown to him, because he was able to suspect that such a simple question entailed a hidden meaning, so consequently it was in no way an easy question but a vital one that was questioning him as a whole. So he reflected before giving an answer, before he continued, as he did, an oblique and propitiatory course (...). (My translation).

105. I recall my mother solving a *serious* problem when a friend of hers married an Italian whose surname was Lamberti; she suggested that the news in the “Wedding Bells” section of *The Southern Cross* should state “Lambert”, which, in the end, could be explained as a typing mistake. And that was the way it appeared: it wasn’t an Irish name but English, which was not that bad.

106. My father, a “Fahy boy” as well, used to proclaim this same assertion.

"I can walk alone." The text is rich in Irish elements: history, mythology, music, religion, and we also find other typical Irish components that define the Irish identity: humor, hyperbole, and love for violence. Behind the story we read there is another one, the one that really counts which, apparently, cannot be efficiently told in a direct way.

"Earthly Responsibilities" is full of religious elements. Here the plot is insignificant, what counts is the Victorian atmosphere, and the distant relationship between the boys and adults. The narrator is ironic when he refers to the Ladies of Saint Joseph, owners of the school. He feels that they, as boarders, mean nothing to them. This attitude is similar when Monsignor Ussher is described. It is clear that they represent the conservative and authoritarian Establishment. No changes should be expected, and according to Ussher "every man should learn his earthly responsibilities as soon as possible in order to become independent and be able to make a living". He finishes his speech assuring that if they do their work properly and piously they will become good citizens, and good sons of their race, their country and their Church. "Race" and "Church" are significant words within the priest's communication as it was in the daily lives of the boarders. As in the previous story, here we also find mythical references to the Irish culture, although iconoclastic:

*Oh Brian Boru  
I shit on you!*

There is a party celebrating *Corpus Christi*, an unusual gap in the boarders' sad life. What is left from the party is a big load of rubbish. The story concludes with the Cat and a companion carrying the leftovers off to the back section of the building. While they are emptying the big box, they feel that something is being emptied from their hearts. In their brief conversation the word "stoicism" appears as a key to better understand the existence of these characters and, by extension, of so many Irish-Porteños who discovered that Argentina was, in the end, a land of broken promises. Again, under the perceptible story,



the narrator offers hints of another one related to power, human relationships and politics.

The author has a serious concern with the art of writing. In these stories the tone is melancholic and sententious. There must have been a hard and patient work to produce them, and the merit is that we do not notice such struggle with words. According to what we know from his daughter and critics like Piglia or Horacio Verbitsky, he was always correcting, always polishing his prose, looking for the proper adjective, the unexpected expression (constantly far from common places) and, in brief, for a precise prose free from senseless words or from what is not functional to the whole. Influenced by the English language, he frequently places the adjective before the noun, which is not common in Spanish and which is more than a syntactical decision: he stresses the definition of what he names. This also concerns certain constructions which are infrequent in Spanish (e.g.: the hyperbaton "*Era feo el gato*")<sup>107</sup>. A controlled sense of Irish humor (sarcastic, ironic and sardonic) overflies his writing together with a restrained use of vulgarisms. In relation to the speech of others, he paid special attention to *what* they said and *how*. And he conveys it effectively. Aware of the real possibilities of language, his expressions were frequently oblique, this in consonance with the Irish language, as explained in Chapter II. Also consonant with the Irish character is the use of hyperbolic statements.

Justice was probably Walsh's main concern. It was the need for justice that moved him to investigate certain episodes of Argentinian contemporary history, publish the results of his work and jump from literature into politics to finally join the armed movement known as Montoneros. "A Dark Day of Justice" gives an early account of the writer's commitment. "Dark" is the adjective that defines the "day of justice". The setting, again, is the Fahy Farm, but now symbolism goes farther and the moral concerns the whole country. At the beginning

107. The regular Spanish construction would be: "*El gato era feo*". ("The cat was ugly", and not "Ugly was the cat"). In "*El 37*" we find a similar anomalous expression: "*Fue muy brusco todo eso*." instead of the usual "*Todo eso fue muy brusco*," ("Very abrupt was all that." and not "All that was very abrupt.").

of the story we are told about Gielty, a pious and cruel tutor who will be punched by an outsider called Malcolm on account of the way he treats the boys. Malcolm is the uncle of one of the boarders, Collins. The unexpected ending shows Malcom beaten by the tutor. The narrator concludes: "People learned that they were alone and that they had to fight for themselves, that within each one of them they would find the way, the silence, the astuteness and the strength." We also get a hint or a moral: there is no justice for the dispossessed.

The four short stories on the Irish in Argentina by Walsh are –text and context– a microcosm of that European community in Argentina; the narrator, an effective critic of an anomalous phenomenon which in the end meant the always enriching encounter of two cultures. More than this, they convey the writer's willingness to fit in. In his article on Walsh, Aníbal Ford (an Irish-Porteño himself) stresses the deep significance of the series, and an intention and objective that affected his personal project as a whole.

En Walsh estos relatos serán no sólo la prehistoria de fondo, el autoanálisis que explica mecanismos que conformarán parte de su obra escrita sino también la búsqueda de inserción personal en la historia de todos. El ciclo de los irlandeses debe ser visto en esta perspectiva.<sup>108</sup>

Ford then argues that in Walsh's writing, the reconstruction of facts implies an analysis of such realities, and that by doing so he discovers the objective conditions of reality and gets over the cultural rules that conceal them. As we have seen, this is certainly true in the case of the examined stories.

Even in the written Spanish texts of certain Irish-Argentine authors we can trace Irishness. It happens to me that while I am reading Rodolfo Walsh (who wrote all his work in Spanish)

108. Ford, A. (1974). Walsh: la reconstrucción de los hechos. In Lafforgue, J. (Ed.), *Nueva novela latinoamericana 2* (p. 304). Buenos Aires: Paidós. (In Walsh, these stories are not only the basic prehistory, the self-analysis that explains mechanisms which will be part of his written work but also a search of personal insertion in the general history. It is from this perspective that the Irish cycle must be seen.) (My translation).

I feel that I am reading an Irish writer in translation. Irony, humor, the struggle for the precise word, the adjective before the noun, syntax and, most of all, obliqueness, are the features revealing his Irish-Porteño condition.

Rodolfo Walsh was critical of the Irish Argentine community in which he included the Catholic Church as its central component. Behind the words of the four short stories we went through, the Irish-Porteños are regarded as members of a strange, disintegrated and isolated community. He wanted something different; his life and his relationship with language are an expressive case of assimilation. As it also happens when we read Samuel Beckett's works originally written in French, we discover that Irishness is still there. Unavoidable patterns, philosophy, humor and echoes of the ancestral speech, as well as marks of the Irish-English language, are in Walsh's writing, but, as a whole, the foreign tongues have been definitely displaced and replaced.<sup>109</sup>

George Steiner (*After Babel*, 1975) suggests that when a language disappears, the identities of the community that used to speak them tend to vanish as well, that a whole philosophy of life is also dissolved. According to Dermot Keogh, less than 5% of the Irish population speaks their original language, but the rest do not feel that they are less Irish on account of that.<sup>110</sup> Steiner's opinion seems not to be applicable to the descendants of the Irish immigrants in Argentina. Probably caused by that strong Celtic sense of identity, Irishness survives and is conveyed in different ways, even in others than language, as it can be seen nowadays in different parts of the country.

109. It is curious (and significant) that, being bilingual, Walsh never dared to translate his own works into the English language. His mystery stories published in the States by detective magazines were always rendered by his American academic friend Donald A. Yates. Borges went through a similar experience: with the only exception of his "Two English Poems", he did all his work in Spanish. Translations were, again, in charge of Donald A. Yates and James Irby (*Labyrinths*); later on, Norman Thomas di Giovanni's versions appeared as worked out "in collaboration with the author."

110. Keogh, D. (2006, October). Los irlandeses. In *Todo es historia*, p. 23.



## CONCLUSION

My perception that the story of the Irish in Argentina is the story of the language and literature of the Irish in Argentina is in the essence of this work. In the context of what I considered a new kind of research, it was my aim to show in what sense my statement was right. Going through the story of the massive Irish migration to Argentina, starting, let us say, in 1844 up to the early 1900s, I stopped at the two well known facts: in terms of culture, the immigrants shared with the host society a same religious credo; but language was a strong barrier for a quick assimilation to the new land. The Catholic Church, great promoter of the Irish Diaspora in Argentina, through the authority of the chaplains, was instrumental to the settlement of their compatriots but, at the same time, by preserving their language, their culture and building up their own social, religious and educational institutions, slowed down the way for them to become integral inhabitants of the country.

Language, in different forms, worked as a subtle and revealing expression of the ups and downs of a slow process through which the Irish immigrants became part of the South American melting pot known as Argentina.

Having had access to old letters, documents and, up to a certain point, oral pronunciations of the elders, it appeared to me that there was a link between language and the situation of the first Irish immigrants and their descendants in Argentina. This was reinforced when I read the classic fictional books of the Irish-Porteños: *Tales of the Pampas*, by William Bulfin, and *You'll Never Go Back*, by Kathleen Nevin. *The Southern Cross*, founded in 1875, together with other publications such as *The Hiberno-Argentine Review*, *The Argentine Review* and *Fianna*, among others, confirmed me that there was a connection between the language and literature of the Irish in Argentina and their slow process of integration, adaptation and assimilation.

This is what my thesis is about. From the very beginning, the title, *What, che?* (taken from what we could call “real life”), shows, in a symbolic way, the symbiosis implied in that rich encounter of cultures that became the Argentine Republic.

*What che? Integration, Adaptation and Assimilation of the Irish-Argentine Community through its Language and Literature* went for the answers to the question whether there is or not a correlation between language and the rather dramatic experience Irish immigrants went through in their struggle to become Argentineans, which is to say between language and life.

Positive answers were found in the mentioned sources.

It is curious to learn that the Irish immigrants started protecting their identity by preserving their imposed language and not their original one. It is true that the Irish language is, in more than one way, giving life to the variation known as Irish-English and to the Irish-Porteño as well.

The *integration* of the Irish into the Argentine society was slow; very few Spanish words appear threading through their tongue and even through that of *The Southern Cross*. In this segment of the story *what* they say counts much more than *how* they say it. Usually hard on the country, little by little they feel immersed in the native reality described by Sarmiento in his *Facundo*, a realm they are not wishing to leave.

The rural short stories written by William Bulfin and published under the title *Tales of the Pampas*, summarize the *adaptation* stage not only through the stories the narrator tells but by combining words of the three languages that exposed the Irish soul. Still alive, factual or virtual, Irish words (which did not play a significant role in the immigration venture) are also combined with Spanish as it can be heard, also, in certain recorded interviews I collected. But in this segment, Irish-English is still the predominant language.

It will be during the third generation of the Irish-Porteños' period that the process will lead up to the *assimilation* stage in which Irish-English will be definitely displaced and replaced by the Argentinian language. The Catholic Church had lost its great influence on the community, whose members,

intermarrying, began feeling that they were an active part of the National community. *The Southern Cross*, again, appears to be the formal expression of this juncture. But, in a later stage of my investigation, I came across the four “Irish Stories” written by Rodolfo J. Walsh, and his works significantly became instrumental to show that Irishness was still there, even under the Spanish voices! It is in the writings of Rodolfo Walsh that we discover echoes of a linguistic past that are still gravitating in a deeper level of his narratives; it is in the interstices of his writing where we discover the (hidden) structures of the Irish system of thought, rejected by the writer. I understand that this approach of mine offers a new course of analysis when trying to unveil the process of identity formation, a kind of new Argentine identity in this case. The same thing can be said in relation to the interviews I quoted for the sake of showing *what* the Irish-Porteño variation expressed, and *how*. These discourses deserve a further exploration in order to tackle with the difficult question of identity. It will be my duty to examine the problem in a new work related to diasporic voices, because, as it happens with Walsh’s writings, new generations of Irish-Porteños (visible and invisible) feel that they are free and out of the influence of their ancestors and their roots. This is a field that deserves scholarly attention.

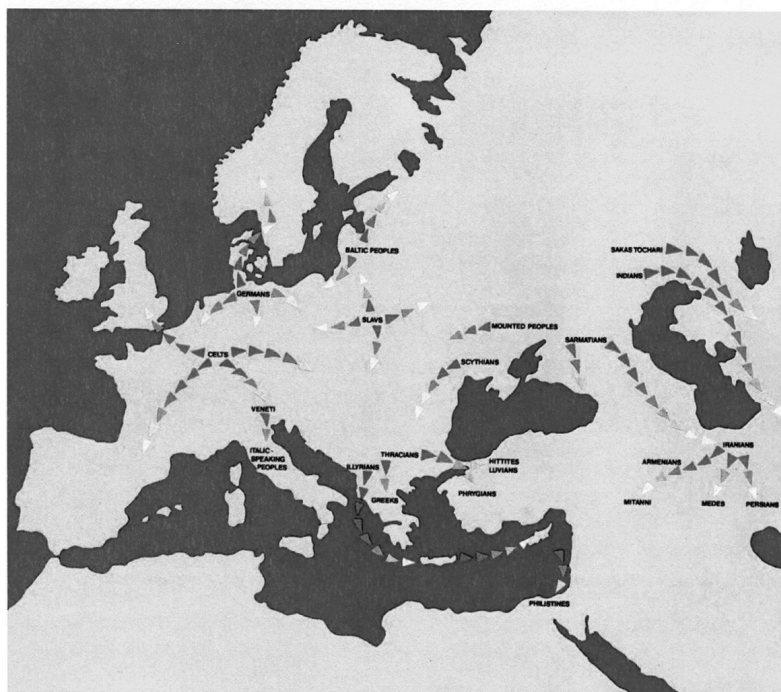
All these curious events showed me that words have a mysterious and independent life. And it is because words appear, disappear or go through transformations according to historical contexts and cultural tensions, that I say that the story of the Irish in Argentina is the story of the language and literature of the Irish in Argentina.



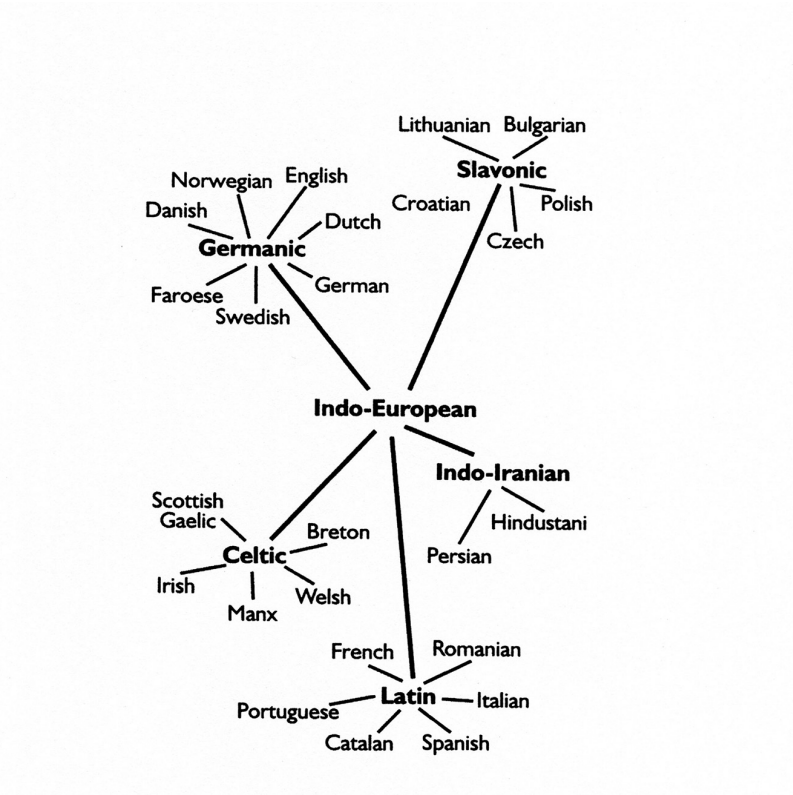


## APPENDIX 1

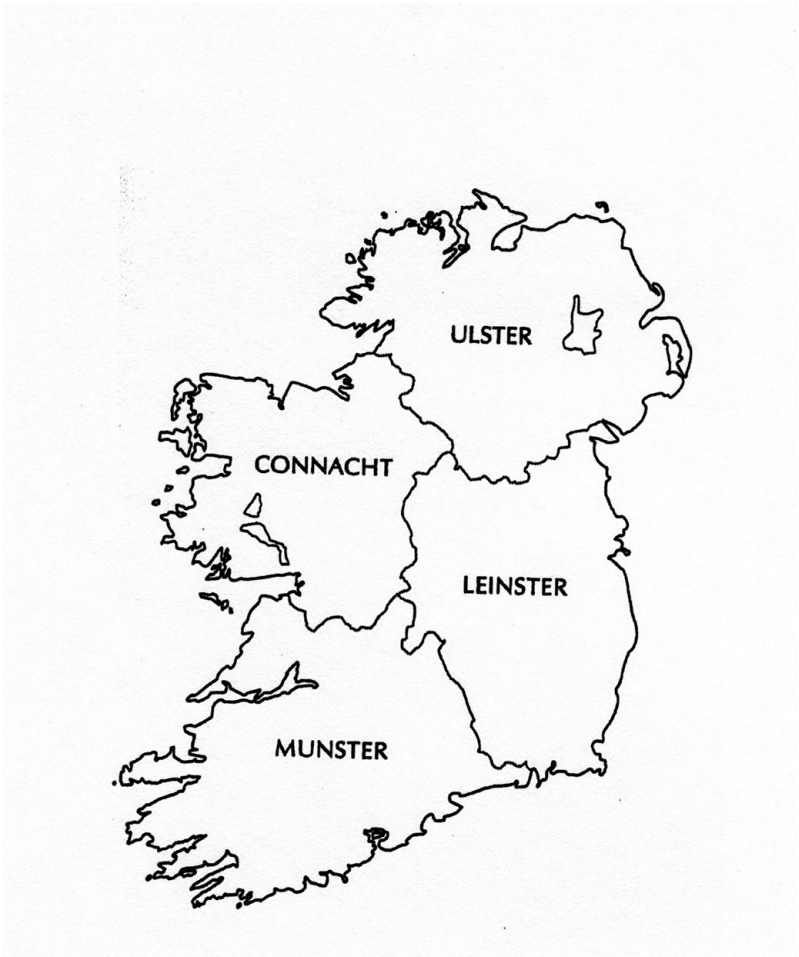
### Maps



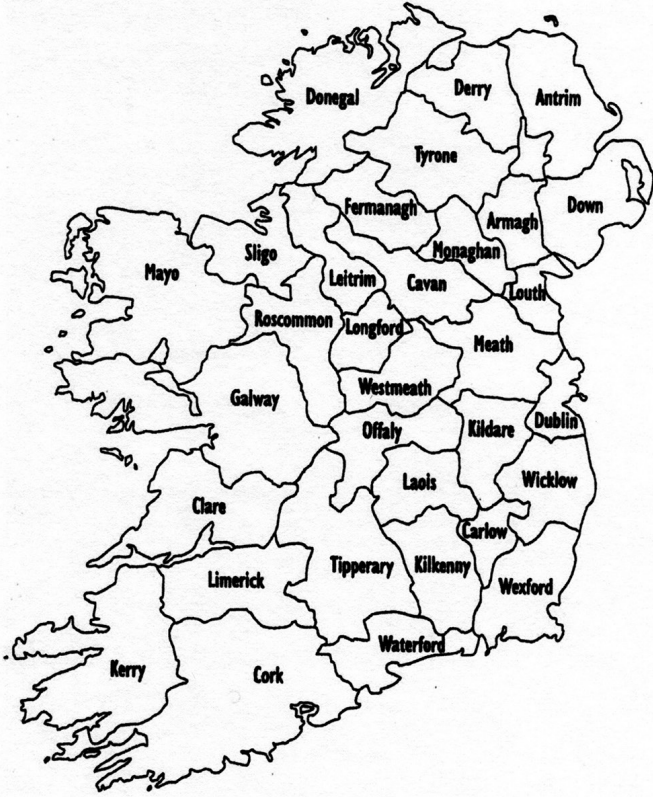
Expansion of the Indo-Europeans



The Indo-European family of languages (Source: Titley, Alan, *A Pocket History of Gaelic Culture*, 2002)

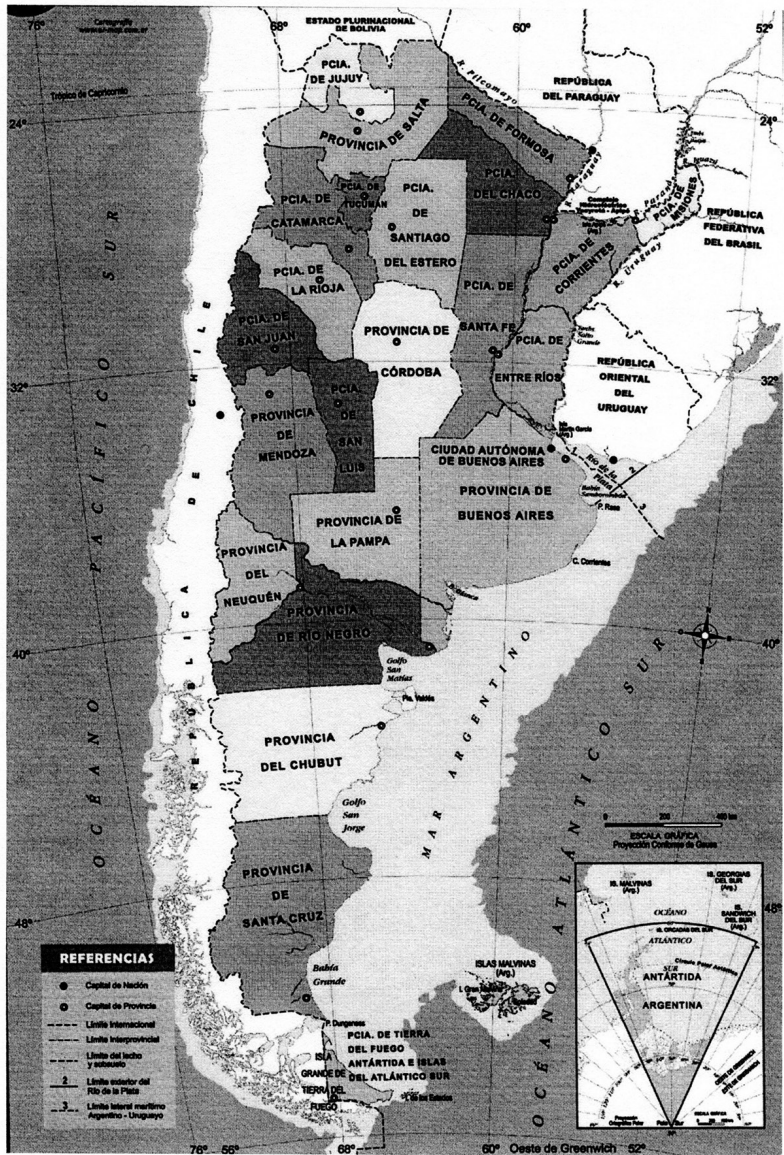


The Provinces of Ireland



The Counties of Ireland





The Argentine Republic



## APPENDIX 2

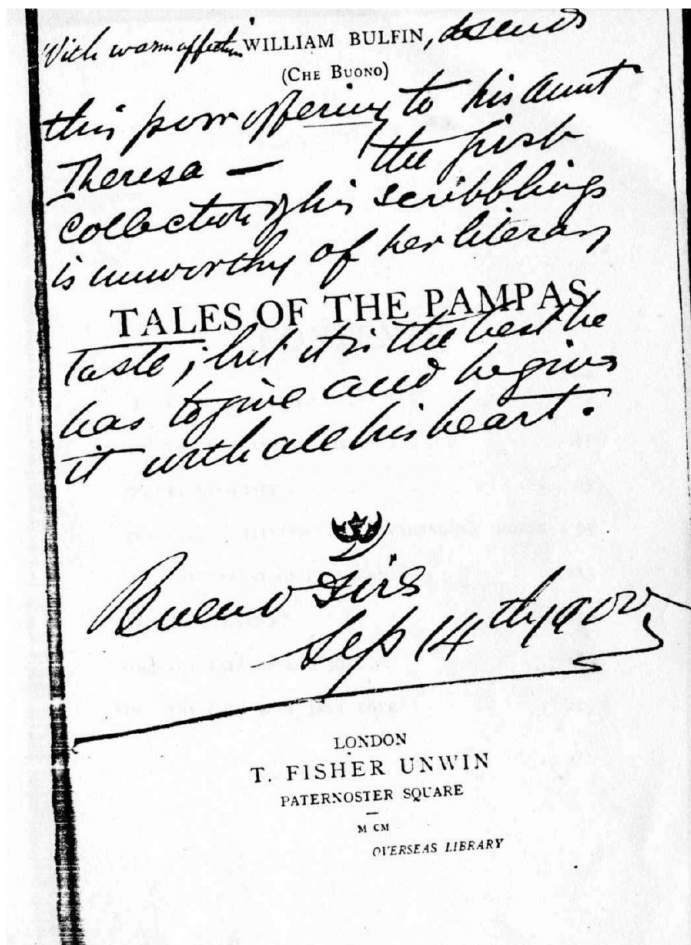
## Documents, photos, clippings and texts

*The customs and habits of the country of Buenos Ayres from the year 1845 by John Brabazon, and his remarkable experiences*

Dec. 13<sup>th</sup> 1845. I arrived here in the big Almonera 300 tons registered. Captain Robert Bull, a good fellow, we arrived here after 3 months' voyage from Kingston Island to Buenos Ayres, we landed in the outer road, and came that next day to the beach in a boat. There we were met by a man called Castor, a man of colour. I believe they ride when we got on the shore or coast as out left on a round house that was left by a man the name of Alchale. There where we were met by my brother and other friends from the old country. That night one of the young fellows invited me to a theatre, but brought me to a different place to a house of that name, where I was surrounded by young ladies, and as my friends despised and left me alone without knowing the language, I was given a little beard, and I gave them all the cash I carried not knowing what it was worth, as brother Tom changed the little money I brought out. I was waiting for employment, in place of a friend of my brother called Bob. He got on a plan with Doctor Andros a country man of his at a 100 dollars a month at that time 10. "a gold for 10 dollars paper made one dollar gold. To bring his horse, an Almonera still about 25, d. Almonera and to about some but we disagreed on account of he wanting one to clean up a room and empty it. I got the boat from the Purveyor of Santa Rosa, a friend of the Doctor's wife was there one month and a half, because I would not do what he wanted to do and threatened to put me in the service as he was a great friend of Doctor's. 18<sup>th</sup> January 25<sup>th</sup> I left and went to Patrick Thomas Naval S. S. at the same day, but having to attend to Captains when the Commodore arrived, we would go up stairs to play cards and drink punch until 12 p.m. to 2 in the night, then they would go down to their boats when they poor sailors would be sailing, for things and sometimes had to bring them on their backs, or pull the boats to the boats. I always went down to the beach, it was the only place to have a resting. One day I was looking at a black washwoman working the beach, and there was no other in those times but black women to a smooth, a little black peeped to give me a mate, that is

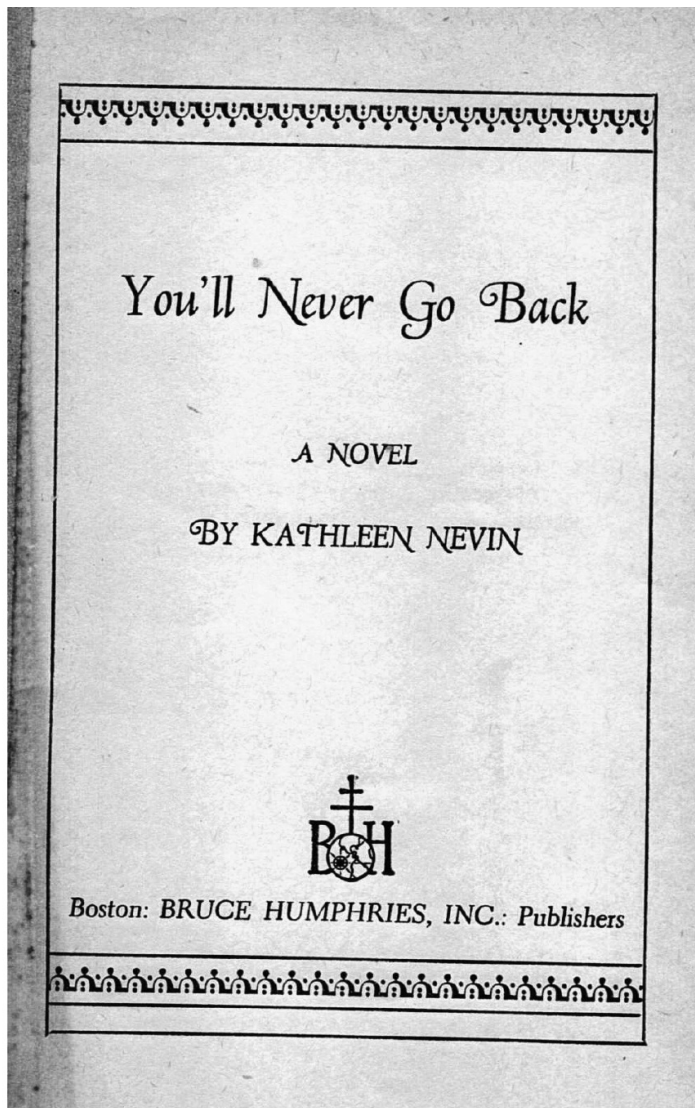
First page of the original diary of John Brabazon





First edition of *Tales of the Pampas*, inscribed by William Bulfin to his aunt Theresa





Title page of the first edition

## gambler's tale

by... Rodolfo J. Walsh

Almost miraculous seemed the luck of Renato Flores. But on each of the spinning, waltzing dice was the Grim Reaper's macabre scythe.

RENATO FLORES, turning a little pale, passed his checkered handkerchief across his moist brow. Then, with a slow movement, he gathered up his gains. As if determined not to be hurried, he smoothed the bills out, one by one, folded them lengthwise and wedged them between the fingers of his right hand where they resembled another wrinkled and dirty hand entwined perpendicularly with his own.

With a studied slowness he dropped the dice into the dice-box, and began to shake them, a double crease furrowing his brow. He seemed to be wrestling with a problem that was becoming more and more difficult with every breath he drew. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders.

"Whatever you say," he proposed.

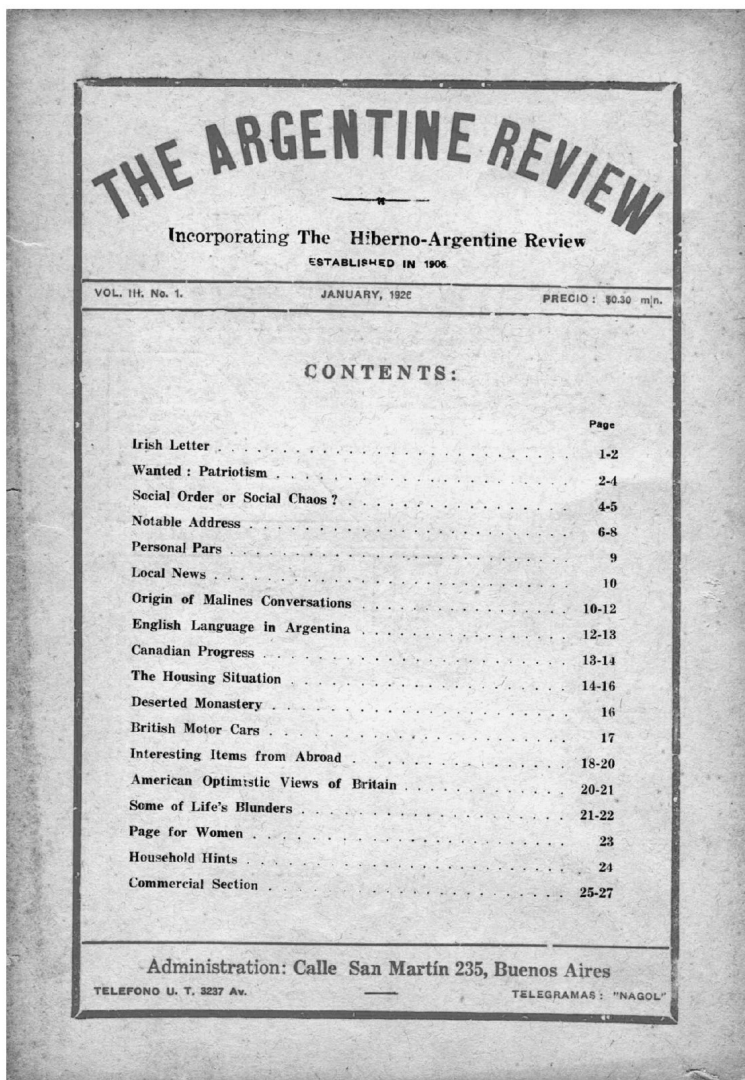
I decided then to remain a spectator solely—a role temperamentally congenial to me as a

---

*So ingeniously persuasive and colorful is this unusual little story of a crime meticulously deadly that it may not surprise you at all to be informed that its author is a native Argentine who has written both strikingly original fiction, and the most learned articles on the detective story in all of South America. But surprise us just a bit it did, and with surprise came delight, for we have long desired to publish the very best of the many fine mystery stories being written in the Latin American countries, in a translation as brilliant as this one by DONALD A. YATES.*

---

Although fully bilingual and a literary translator, Rodolfo Walsh significantly did not translate his work into the English language. A version by Donald A. Yates of "Gambler's Tale" was published by *The Saint Detective Magazine*, on February 1955.



Cover of the January 1926 issue of *The Argentine Review*

№ 3

## COLEGIO "SAN PATRICIO"

MERCEDES Bs. As.

---

Recibi del Sr. D. Tomás Dunne la cantidad  
de setenta pesos centavos m/na-  
 cional en pago de pensión por su hijo Tomás  
Dunne  
 Desde marzo 2 de 1915 hasta junio 2 de 1915

**Son \$ 40 m/n.**

Observaciones: marzo 2 de 1915  
Tomás O'Grady

Imp. Ortiz y Castellani - Mercedes (B. A.)

Saint Patrick's, in Mercedes, was a boarding school run by the  
 Pallotines



An Irish-Porteño tomb at the Cemetery of San Pedro,  
in Buenos Aires





Fahy Institute, in Capilla del Señor (BA), where the action of  
“El 37”, by Rodolfo J. Walsh, takes place.



**THE SOUTHERN CROSS**  
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BUENOS AIRES, VIERNES, JULIO 9, 1976

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# Consternación y horror ante la masacre sacerdotal

## Miles de fieles tributan su homenaje

En esta hora inaudita que vive la Argentina, se escribió esta mañana un sangriento capítulo que no tiene precedentes en toda la historia del país: la despiadada masacre de toda una Comunidad religiosa, sin distinción de edad o condición.

Para la Comunidad argentina irlandesa esta dolorosa tragedia tiene efectos de una desgracia personal, porque las víctimas de esta nueva locura subversiva han sido los Fieles Palotinos, columna donde hace casi un siglo de nuestros comunidades y familias.

La población despertó el domingo con la truenante noticia del



Cerca de doscientos sacerdotes y una multitud de fieles rodean los féretros en la Misa exequial



R. P. ALFREDO LEADEN  
R.I.P.

Miembro de una conocida y respetable familia de nuestra Comunidad, contaba 57 años. Ordenado hace unos 35 años, había cursado sus estudios en Thurles, Irlanda y luego en Roma. Sirvió en las distintas comunidades palotinas de Rawson, Mercedes y San Antonio de Arco. Una de las figuras más distinguidas de su Orden ocupaba actualmente el cargo de Superior Mayor de la Vice Provincia de los PP. Palotinos. Hombre de profunda virtud, caballero en la total acepción de la palabra, era amado de sus feligreses y amigos.

frio e inhumano asesinato de los PP. Alfredo Leaden, Alfredo Kelly, Pedro Duffau y los seminaristas de la Congregación Salvador Barbetto y José Emilio Barletti, miembros de la Comunidad religiosa sita en la Iglesia de San Patricio, en Belgrano.

### LOS HECHOS

De todas las fuentes posibles hemos podido recoger que el trágico suceso a la parroquia de San Patricio se produjo en la madrugada del domingo 4, probablemente hacia las 3 de la mañana, cuando ya algunos de los religiosos estaban entregados al reposo y otros a punto de hacerlo, luego de regresar. No habiendo testigos, se presupone que los asesinos

no hayan tocado el timbre, y penetrado dentro al ser contestada la llamada. Qué pasó luego, sólo Dios y los monjes lo saben, pero al llegar los feligreses para la primera Misa a las ocho y ver cerradas las puertas del templo y nadie contestar a las llamadas a la casa parroquial, un joven, luego de violentar una ventana hizo el terrible descubrimiento: el cadáver de los tres sacerdotes y dos seminaristas, acorillados a balazos.

Sobre la puerta de una de las habitaciones estaba escrita la leyenda: "por nuestros hermanos policías dinamitadores" y sobre una alfombra roja, otra que leía: "a los que pervertieron las mentes de los jóvenes". Se comprobó asimismo que se había realizado una reunión de la casa especialmente de libros, papeles y hasta cassettes.

Se abrió para todo el país la interrogante de quiénes serían los autores de la masacre y cuáles sus motivaciones.

### VELATORIO DE LOS RESTOS

La horrible noticia corrió rápidamente por la ciudad y una multitud continua, comenzó a engrosar a los fieles que acudían al templo de San Patricio, ansiosos de compartir el dolor de los PP. Palotinos, de manifestar su adhesión y su repudio y ofrecer sus oraciones por los religiosos sacrificados. Este destile duró todo el domingo hasta pasada la medianoche, permaneciendo los fieles es-

(Continúa en la página 2)

TSC reports on the massacre at St. Patrick's Church





### APPENDIX 3

#### *Irish Argentines Speaking* *The complete interviews*

##### SPEAKER 1

T. C. (Female). Age: 75. Recorded on July 31, 2002, at her home in Villa Devoto (Buenos Aires)

T. C. did her Primary School at St. Brigid's, in Buenos Aires. She gives a brief account of her experience with the nuns at that Irish-Porteño institution. She also refers to her first job. Her accent is frequently influenced by Spanish pronunciation: when she says "lucky" [u:] or adapts Spanish words, creating neologisms or interpolates Spanish expressions, "pension" [e], instead of "boarding house", for example. "Should" appears introducing an explanatory clause. Influenced by the Argentine use of Spanish verbs, she avoids the Present Perfect Tense and the Past Perfect Continuous Tense.

We used to get up early in the morning, go to mass, then we had breakfast: a cup of coffee and milk, and a piece of bread; sometimes, hard bread. We never complained, there we couldn't complain. Each of us had a charge. Then, Spanish classes began, with Spanish teachers. When Spanish classes finished we had lunch; a very poor lunch. I used to be very hungry. A bit of hard meat and half a potato in the oven. Sometimes, if we were *lucky*, a plate of soup. On Sundays, fruit. (...) In the afternoon we had the English classes. The nuns taught us very well, they were all Irish nuns. (...) They didn't mind if we spoke Spanish. (...) Perhaps Religion was my favorite subject. As I was so sad, it was a consolation for me. My mother was sick and she couldn't come to see me, because on Sundays we had visitors, and I had never visitors. (...) I also enjoyed literature. I still can quote lines by poet Thomas Hood: *I remember, I remember / The house where I was born, / The little window where the sun / Came peeping in at morn; He never came a wink too soon / Nor brought too long a day; / But now, I often wish the night / Had borne my breath away. (...) I remember, I remember / The fir-trees dark and high;*

*/ I used to think their slender tops / Were close against the sky:  
It was a childish ignorance / But now 'tis little joy / To know I'm  
farther off from Heaven / Than when I was a boy. (...) They were*  
very strict in Religion. Every Friday we had to go to confession, and on Sundays, if Sister Superior saw us going to communion without confessing, she would stop us and say: "I didn't see you confessing!" The priests, the Passionist Fathers, were very kind in confession... *should* we were only kids! I used to go to confession with Father Frank, who was a very old man. I used to tell us that everybody could change for the better. He was once found drunk in a *zanja*. I used to tell us that he was a kind of a scamp. (...) That was Father Frank. I don't remember his surname. (...) At school they never spoke about the facts of life. Never, never. We were ignorant. My companions thought me the wrong way. They thought us religion in a cruel way. They used to say: "Remember that the doors of hell are always open for you!" One day the Superior came into the room and we didn't dar cuenta it was cold and we had the windows open. She shouted: "Mad! Madder than mad!" They had that Victorian education... At 3:30 we had tea. Tea, milk and bread. Then we had a little recreation and then we had to study. At 8:00, dinner. They used to give us some Quaker with milk and a cup of tea. At 9 we were in bed.

At that time, especially if you knew English well, *sexto grado* was enough. When I left Saint Brigid's, I went to a private teacher, Mrs. Kelly, to improve my English and learn short-hand. (...) I lived with my family in Villa Urquiza, and then in Santos Lugares. Most of my friends lived in the Irish Girl's Home, an old institution. My mother lived there when she came from the *camp*. (...) There was an old lady... she was very cross... She had a *pension*-house... and she used to go to the home, looking for girls who wanted to work there. (...) In Santos Lugares there was so many Irish...! In calle Calixto Oyuela there was a big *conventillo* full of old maids. A Passionist Father used to come once a month to confess the Irish, Father Joseph Champion. And then, Father Fidelis Rush. (...) Teddy Dillon got a position for me in Johnson Line, the Sweden Company. They were very pleased with my work. Some of them used to say that they had pity on me because I was so shy. At that time I was 17.

## SPEAKER 2

L.D. (Male). Age: 72. Recorded on August 30, 2002, at *The Southern Cross* office, in Buenos Aires City.

L.D. did his Primary School at the Fahy Farm, in Moreno (Buenos Aires). He immediately started working as an office-boy in town, that job was the beginning of his career in American Companies. L.D. considers himself a self-made man, he appears to be happy with the family he was able to bring up, and he is constantly grateful to what he received from the Irish boarding school. As it happens in the Spanish language in relation to Argentine speakers, L.D., as an Irish-Porteño, avoids the Present Perfect Tense. L. D. is conscious of his particular (limited) English language. He even laughs at the way the Irish-Porteños speak the language. He usually speaks in plural, as he is referring to his schoolmates. Retired, L. D. worked at the office of *The Southern Cross*. Nailed to one of the walls there is a framed copy of the poem "If", by Rudyard Kipling the official poet of the British Empire.

I was born in the *camp*, as they call it here. In the province of Buenos Aires.

When I was 5 or 6 years old, I started to go to school on horseback. And when I was 9, they sent me to the Fahy School, in Capilla (Capilla del Señor, BA). I remember that I had to fill in a form, and where it said "Born", I wrote "yes", meaning that I was a living guy. In Capilla I spent three years, from 1939 to 1941. Then I was transferred to the Moreno section for elder students. *I spent in Moreno* four years and I finished the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, 1945, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December of the same year, that means ten days later, I started to work in a company called David Hog, who were the owners of the City Hotel, and there I spent four years.

In 1945 we came from General Pinto, the countryside where we lived, to Santos Lugares. We had relatives who were living there and they found a place where we could rent a house. The owner of the house in calle Calixto Oyuela was an Irish *fella* (sic) called Ennis, doctor Ennis.

(...) *At David Hog, I started learning those accounting machines which in those days they paid very well, so, without*

*going to the Faculty of Economy, I learnt through those NCR accounting machines...* So it was there that I learned accounting. After that I moved to a company that manufactured candies, “Mu-Mu”, and to other companies. (...) When we started working in those companies, we were all prepared, we never missed a class. At the Fahy we had the Spanish classes in the morning, then we had lunch, we went to the playground and in the afternoon we had two hours of English. We couldn’t speak a word in Spanish. (...) And now I remember Father Gormly (see Chapter I), who died just a month ago at the age of 90... He was a very strict professor, *and once he was looking down from a window* and saw me speaking with another gay who he knew that he never spoke a word of English, so when he got down stairs, he called me and said: “Why were you speaking Spanish in English hour?”, “No, I wasn’t”, was my reply. “Yes you were because you were talking to Fernando who doesn’t know a word in English...”. So they were so strict... *The little English that I can speak I learnt in the Fahy*, and at home. But then we started *losing* it at home. *Affortunately* (sic), as from 1965 I started to work in American companies. I answered an ad from Dow Chemical in the newspaper, and I don’t know whether I was lucky or not but it was there that I met my (future) wife. We have been married since 1957. Then I was transferred to Velsicol. When they left Argentina, I joined another Company called Travenol International.

By 1954, some former pupils founded the Fahy Club. I joined them. We were all from Irish stuff. The Fahy Club was one of the only Irish groups at that time. Twice a month we would have a dance, and for lunch, we, the Irish, *joint* (sic) together, once or twice a week, in a restaurant called “Criterion”, and in another place called “Cable”, in calle Sarmiento. In Chacabuco and Avenida de Mayo there was a place called “Tres Ases”. But the Fahy Club was the regular place in which we use to meet. In Santos Lugares, I use to meet my Irish friends: Walsh, Murtagh, Coughlan, Dermott, Charlie Shanahan, my brother Mike... We met on Saturday night, and on Sundays at midday, after mass. This (place) was in front of the church, we used to call it Dutruel, who was a player of the Chacarita professional

team. He opened that place, and it was a group of about twenty.

We used to go out with the girls of St. Brigid's. We were all single, *trying to make up something*. *Some of us had their fiancée* in Salguero 550 (see Chapter I). Father Fidelis would say: "Marry your own!"

(...) When I met Irish people, they say: "You are like one of our own. You have our accent. And you are third generation!" I was brought up by an Irish family; the Fahy Institute was run by Pallottine priests who were Irish. What can you expect?

Here, in *The Southern Cross*, where I work now, I'm always exposed to Irish speakers... Although I am not fluent as in Spanish, I'm able to manage with my English.

SPEAKERS 3, 4 and 5

LG, MG, and IG (Sisters). Age: won't tell (circa 75). Recorded on July 29, 2004, at their home in Mercedes (Buenos Aires).

LG: We are from Florida, Partido de San Andrés de Giles. We were just in the limit of Mercedes.

MG: Our grandfather came from Ireland and married an Irish-Argentine.

IG: I think she was Irish...

LG: She died when the first child was born. (...) When his wife died he went back to Ireland and back with our granny. They came to Giles. I don't know if they bought *campos* or they were given *campos*...they were colonizing or something like that...

MG: They started being sheep-farmers. (...).

IG: There was a strong Irish community here. (...) His sisters were only supposed to go to the gate... and they all died without being married. That was typical Irish... the same, the boys... all bachelors... They died young.

LG: We were educated at St. Mary's, in San Antonio de Areco. (...) Our brothers, in Clonmacnoise...

IG: ... they *started* in Clonmacnoise!

LG: Yes, and then they went here, in St. Patrick's.

MG: It still exists, but it isn't an Irish School anymore... they teach the Official English... it is a *mixed school* now...

LG: We were connected through the Church, we had dances, we did all here in Mercedes. Our father married an Irish girl who lived here in Mercedes. (...).

IG: We always received *The Southern Cross*...*it was like going to mass*. We had to read *The Southern Cross*, then it was all in English.

MG: WE knew people from BA who lived here in Mercedes (...). My small girl went to St. Brigid's...

IG: We don't have a strong Irish community now, very few... *and not very young*(...) up to our generation we married our own people. Then they married Italians, Argentines...

IG: ... I could have married... I knew lots of (Irish) boys but I didn't, I married a French...

MG: *When I married an English descent, we received the Buenos Aires Herald*.

LG: But never at home.

LG: When the time came and we had to be educated, my father contacted Teresa Geoghegan de Mac Dermot, perhaps you know her...

MG: From Carmen de Areco...

LG: From Carmen de Areco. That was our teacher. English, Spanish, Religion, Manners, everything.

IG: Then they sent us to St. Mary's.

LG: As boarders...

IG: Was I happy there? Very...

(...).

MG: In the past the Irish community here was very important, we had very nice *fiestas*. (...). When we were very small, they played Hurling here...

IG: ... Very often...

MG: Sí, the priests from St. Patrick's played and some of the teachers played and people from about here. (...). And there are people who play *truco* and don't know how to play forty-five! It's very like bridge, more or less.

LG: We all play... in the *camp* with the Morrows, the Gaynors, the Thompsons, the Morgans, Duffys, Rooneys... No, no the Rooneys are from Venado Tuerto.

MG: Oh, yes! They came on the brick, rain or no rain... (...). I

still make Irish dumplings; I prepare them with flour, salt and milk. We love potatoes, potatoes in their jackets. We are all specialists in plum-puddings.

SPEAKER 6

P. D. (Male). Age: 71. Recorded on August 13, 2005, at his home in Núñez (Buenos Aires).

A former Passionist priest, P. D. is now retired and devotes his time to read and write. He is very critical on the Catholic Church in General and on the Passionist Congregation in particular. His parents were Irish and they came out to Argentina during the 1950s. P. D. compares the English of the Irish with that of the Irish-Porteños and finds that the Irish-English is much more emotional and expressive. Irish-Porteños, he assures, will rarely use interjections. He believes that Irish-Porteños' language is very personal and intimate on account of certain nostalgia for the ancestral land. "Among the Irish-Porteños, you'll hardly find a personality like Bernadette Devlin" –he says. But he immediately admits: "Yes, Rodolfo Walsh was one, but the Irish-Porteños are clung to the past." P.D.'s speech is centered on his experience as a member of the Passionist Congregation.

After WWII, the Irish community in itself, bit by bit, disappeared. There was no further immigration. Irish-Argentines started speaking more Spanish than English, and they started marrying non-Irish. Their children didn't speak English and so forth... So consequently, the incidence in the (Passionist) congregation was very poor. For instance, after 1930 there were no Irish Passionists in Argentina. (...) There was an Irish-Argentine bishop, Gilligan, from 9 de Julio... he wanted to be a Passionist, but he couldn't be a Passionist because he didn't know English. His father was Irish, his mother wasn't Irish. (...) After the seventies, the Passionists divided into the Progressive and the Conservatives. (...) It was a tremendous difficult division... and in itself very unsubstantial. (...) I was never related to the Irish community here because once I was ordained a priest, I was most of my time out of Buenos Aires. I would go from one place to another... and then I was seven

years in the Movimiento Rural which had nothing to do with the Irish. In that sense there really wasn't much contact.

#### SPEAKER 7

M. C. D. (Female). Age: 81. Recorded on November 16, 2002 at St. Patrick's Home (Villa Elisa, Buenos Aires).

Member of a well off family, she was well educated and, consequently, her English is good. The difference with others is that she is conscious of the influence of the Spanish language on the Irish-Porteño speech. She is aware of it and she even laughs at it.

My grandparents are... were... Irish. Where were they from? I wish I could tell you. I'm not sure. I studied with a *gobernanta*. My father married in the States... out of the country, so I was born out there.

I went to different schools in town. I was very friendly with the Irish community. I worked at the Irish Embassy, with Mr. Murphy.

(At St. Patrick's Home) I'm all day reading. I don't read fiction, I read serious books. Thomas Merton. I read many of his books.

Years pass so quick!

With the British community we were excellent friends.

My father was all-blood Irish, but he worked in the *country* and he liked the natives. He was a real "criollo". Here I was always told that my accent was an Irish accent (...).

A sister of ours married a Protestant, his father was a bishop. A fantastic man! He knew the Bible by memory. Lucy would have liked him to become a Catholic, but it did never happen. It wasn't in him. They had a son, and when the boy had made his First Communion, his father in law advised her to bring him to Argentina for some time. He always went to Catholic Schools (...) Now he's a good catholic, the boy, and he married a Catholic girl.

At home, we generally spoke English, mama was an Argentine, but she preferred speaking in English. In her house they used to speak English. They didn't have teachers; they had teachers living in the house. And they were very well brought up. (...) When they went to school, they went to Catholic schools, Saint



Patrick's... (...). We spoke English but we also spoke Spanish. As you can see, I mix the two things. John, my husband, was different; he spoke English because he had good teachers in the house, his mother used to speak English to him. I speak Irish-Porteño. People who don't know us, find it funny.

My parents went to Ireland to celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. (It happened that) they were speaking between themselves... they were speaking Irish-Porteño. It was reported that they were speaking Irish. But they were speaking Irish-Porteño!

I used words in Gaelic, but now I don't remember them. My father spoke English, Gaelic and Spanish. He was a very, very nice old man. He died in 1929.

I think that the Irish community became more Irish now. It is fashion to be Irish. I was only one month in Ireland. I went with my husband. He was received with open arms by the Prime Minister, De Valera! We went to visit him. A nice old man! Walking around with his cane... He knew about the existence of an Irish community in Argentina. We went with Fr. Celestine Butterly, CP. (...). We were great friends here in BA, and he went with us to see De Valera.

#### SPEAKER 8

D. K. (Male). Age: 65. Recorded on July 29, 2004, at his home in Mercedes (Buenos Aires). On July 4, 1976, his brother, a Catholic priest and member of the Pallottine congregation, together with two other priests and two young seminarians, was shot at St. Patrick's Church, in Belgrano (Buenos Aires) by a firing squad related to the 1976-1982 dictatorship. D. K., who married an Irish-Porteña in Suipacha (BA), worked all his life in the camp and finally moved to Mercedes, tells the story of his brother.

We were always connected *with* the Parish. We were reared up in the camp. (...) We went to school in the camp, with a private mistress who was not Irish. *We went to school in Spanish.* We spoke English at home. My mother worked seven years in Buenos Aires, before she got married, and *she had good Spanish.* My father *had very poor Spanish.* He took everything wrong.

We used to feel ashamed of speaking English before anyone else. (...) Alfie started *studying* Latin with Fr. O'Brien, here in St. Patrick's. That was the beginning. He used to come in three times a week, he used *to come in horseback to the ruta...* At that time, if you wanted to be a priest, the first thing was to study Latin. He was 12 years old. There was an *awful* connection with the family. (...) When we *would come in here*, to Mercedes, our house was St. Patrick's. We used to remain there two or three days and all that, *in the Casa Parroquial*. (...). That was the Irish way, and there *was* a lot of Irish families. In 1947 he went to Seminary, in Rawson. He did not do Secondary School. (...) *Then*, they brought him to San Miguel, to the Colegio Máximo. *At those times* they didn't do Secondary School. And then he went one year to San Antonio de Areco, and *done the noviciado* with Fr O'Neill. Fr. O'Neill accompanied him since he was born. *In the Colegio Máximo he lived three years. In '54 he went to Rome for to finish his studies* and be ordained. In '57 his father got sick so the Pallottines decided to bring him back here in 1957, and he was ordained in June of 1957, here in Mercedes, by Monseñor Anunciado Serafin. And his first mass was in Suipacha. (...) He was one year in Mercedes, he *remained* here, and then he was in San Antonio de Areco, and used to travel to Santiago del Estero where the Pallottines had a mission. (...) *He was always fond of the youth and he formed a group here: VIPAL (Vivir por Algo)*. They still get together. (...) In 1967, when St. Patrick's, in San Antonio de Areco, became a Parish, he was the first Parish Priest. In '73 he was named Parish Priest of Belgrano. He was three years there. He was happy there. He wouldn't change it for a camp town. (...)

My grandfather *came down here in 1862*. He married Mary Gilligan, an Irish girl. In 1885 they moved to Suipacha, and in 1890 they bought the land that we have now. Our son, Tom, since he was 6 was always saying that he would go to Ireland, and that's what he did when he was 22. His great grandfather left Ireland when he was 22. He is very happy there. I would say he is too happy.

SPEAKER 9

M.C. (Female). Age: 76. Recorded on February 6, 2004, in

Martínez (Buenos Aires).

M.C. gives an account of her days at the Irish Girl's Home (see Chapter I).

I know the Sisters of Mercy *since very small. I made my Primary School* in Rawson, provincia de Buenos Aires, in St. Anne's. Later on in Saint Brigid's (...) The Parish Church was also in the Pallottine Fathers... (unfinished sentence). I knew (Fr.) Kevin O'Neill with short trousers. Then in Saint Brigid's, three years, and in the Irish Girls' Home three years more, until my parents came to live in Buenos Aires.

The Irish Girls' Home was run by the Sisters of Mercy since many, many years ago... I haven't the date exact. Aunts of mine, much older than me, also occasionally lived in the Home. (...) We had to be single women and any age (even old ladies). That was..., occasionally, the problem because we were a group of young girls who left mostly Saint Brigid's and some bigger ladies that lived permanently there. At that time, and this time also, is rather difficult for two different generations to cope. That's the problem.

Most of us were already working in offices. Girls who left St. Brigid's were very well appreciated in big enterprises like English-speaking banks and lots of *companies*... Shell, Esso, Anglo, all those companies...

Sometimes, most of the times, we had to share the room with other girls... There was a bigger room that seven or eight used to share, regardless of the age. That was a problem. There was only two big rooms, the *rester* (sic) were smaller. The *frent* (sic), the front of the building, there were room of two or three girls; at the back there were bigger rooms.

(M.C. shows photos of the Irish Home, while she continues speaking). She says: This was a long balcony, where the big rooms look to a very big garden. In the afternoons the sun used to give there and it was very nice.

It was not indispensable to be an Irish descent. But there were supposed to be Catholics. We had mass if we wanted to go, every day. The Irish Home was practically a help for all those young girls that had to live there. Now, at eight o'clock in the night the door closed. If you were late you had to stay out...

until 6 o'clock in the morning. When there were Fahy's dances or something like that... Some girls used to stay out all night. (...) The Fahy Club used to rent the *Salón Suizo en la calle Rodríguez Peña*. At that time all dances used to finish at three o'clock in the morning. At that time, the forties, you could perfectly well stay out in groups without danger.

(...) When a girl was without a job, in the central hall we always had the *Herald*. At that time, in the *Herald* you could put a small ad, answer three letters and the next day we had answers from the companies. We could choose a job! The English was important.

Men were allowed to visit the building only in a special parlour. In the middle of the building there was a big *pasillo* looking on to Salguero (street)... For example, another girl used to receive on Saturdays, a short-hand professor. But he usen't (sic) to be in the parlour, but in another big *salón* where Sister Mary Egan used to be going about controlling, with all the doors open. She (Sister Mary Egan) was a jack of all trades... all the *quejas* were for her... The Fahy boys were always hanging around Salguero 550.

That was our life. (...) I was happy there. We were treated well.

#### SPEAKER 10

L.R. (Female). Age: won't tell (circa 90). Recorded on November 16, 2002, at Saint Patrick's Home (Villa Elisa, Buenos Aires).

L. R. offers disjointed glimpses of her life and, in a very curious English language, she gives critical comments on the way English is spoken by the Irish-Porteños, including herself.

My parents were from Maggiolo (in Santa Fe). *There were lots of Irish, years back*. Our Estancia is called San Patricio. *We were nine children in the year 1917, we didn't fit*. (...). My father had a sister who became a nun... from the Santa Unión... here in town, in calle Esmeralda. She died very young, *she was about thirty something*. When my father heard that they had inherited a place in Ireland, a farm, I don't know what, my grandfather didn't want to go back, so he passed it onto his brother who was single, he was M.R. He went to Ireland,

married a widow next door, and never came back. My father was with Edward Casey when he founded Venado Tuerto... (*Sorry but I'm used to Spanish mostly*). The girls went to school in town, to the Esclavas, we were all boarders. Boys went to Marín. They didn't send us to Irish schools because there were not so good. (...) There was an English nun, Sister Clara... they were Spaniards. That was supposed to be a very good school. They taught English, and French and piano. We went back to the *campo*. The *campo* was our life. We loved it. The boys and father worked, we played tennis. No! *We did our bit!* Then, gradually, the elder girls started marrying and now there is nobody there. My youngest sister inherited the Estancia. And she is living there with her children. *The camp, now, is very difficult to live...* you can't get people to work, *nobody wants to do nothing*, not even chop wood, they don't want to go. (...).

We had an English teacher at home. *Most of the estancias did that*. All the nannies *came out from England*. The Irish didn't know how to speak proper English. We received *The Southern Cross* like the Bible, we still have the old ones. (...).

St. Patrick's Bazar was a must.

One day they suggested I help here... my grandmother was in the first Committee of St. Patrick's Home, and then my mother, and I followed, and the younger generation they all come and help. All of them. And you can say that they are nearly natives because they married... my sisters married real argentines! Complete argentines! *Criollos*. And the children go to the bazaar and work more than the Irish. With more enthusiasm than the Irish. (...). And they have nothing to do with the Irish. *They don't even speak English*.



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